# From Capitol to Campus:
## A Practitioner's Toolkit for Protecting Academic Freedom in the Face of State and Federal Challenges

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## Table of Contents

**Introduction** 2
**What's at Stake** 4
**Agitate! Agitate! Agitate!** 6
**Tracking Tools** 7
**Essential Resources** 10
- Congress 10
- Marches/Rallies/Protests 12
- Campaigning 12
- Additional Campaigning Tools 13

**Introductory Emails to Offices** 15
**Introductory Phone Calls to Offices** 18
**Timely Meeting Requests** 21
**Email and Phone Campaigns** 22
**Count the Damn Seats** 23
**Actionable Asks** 25
**Issue Experts are Welcome** 27
**How to Help in Committee** 28
**Don't go in with Vague, Nuanced, or Incorrect Asks** 29
**Amendments** 30
**Winning in the Streets** 32
**Courts** 34
**Be the Bigger Asshole** 35
**Running for Office** 36
**AI and Elections** 37
**Targeting** 38
**Social Media - Meet the People Where They Are** 39
**Advocacy Outside of the Capitol** 40
**Support Winners (Avoiding Political Grifts)** 41
**Structured Advocacy** 42
**The Art of Brevity** 44
**The Art of the Bluster** 45
**The Art of Compromise** 48
**Dilatory Tactics** 50
**Coordinated Advocacy** 52
**Fight!** 53
**Postface** 54
**APPENDIX: Research, Context, and Explanatory Notes** 55
- Check the Calendar 55
- Understand the Schedule? 61
- Getting around D.C. and the Capitol 62
- Florida Legislature 65
- Texas Legislature 68
- Trump 1.0 70
- Trump 2.0 72
- Elections in Focus 72
- Just because you are right, does not mean you are right 74
- Compromise is a BFD 74

# 1. Introduction

I wanted to ensure that I provided a detailed enough toolkit that individuals could read and would be able to take action in defending academic freedom on college campuses. Still, there are actions and questions that rely on a conversation or Zoom. There are still parts of me thinking of the 30 or 50 additional pages I could add to this toolkit. And parts of me that want to tell you go and FIGHT LIKE HELL!

During this fellowship, I worked to break down research and provide insight to equip academics, advocates, and policymakers with strategies for navigating and counteracting political threats to academic freedom.

With the beginning of the fellowship, I initially thought this paper was going to be primarily a state-level discussion with a minor federal element. As this year has continued, the focus has quickly moved to a federal focus. So, my writing followed the nation's interest.

As a practitioner, I swore I would be brief with this toolkit, but that did not happen. As I'm not an academic, this paper will not have the standard academic writing style and format. My goal is to provide readers with an actionable toolkit, so that you know what you are fighting for and how to win.

## My Background

My work in the policy and the political landscape has provided me with over 15 years of experience understanding what works and does not work in legislatures and in campaigns. My political experience includes running field campaigns, serving as a campaign manager at both the state and federal levels, acting in a senior advisory capacity on congressional campaigns, building overarching campaign strategies for congressional and statewide campaigns, and providing targeting insight. My state policy experience includes working in the Florida Senate Democratic Office as a policy analyst, for a Florida Representative as a personal office staffer, serving as the Staff Director for the Florida House of Representatives Democratic Office, and as Chief of Staff to the Florida House Democratic Leader. My federal policy experience includes serving as the policy director for a member of Congress whose committee's focus consists of the land-grant institutions with a focus on HBCUs, and as the Legislative Director and Senior Advisor to the (then) Chair/Ranking Member of the Higher Education & Workforce Development Subcommittee. I have additional state, federal, policy, and political experience, but those roles cover much of the experience that prepared me to write this fellowship. My current position presents me with the ability to participate in conversations and to be in rooms that have crafted my understanding of policy. Through regular constituent meetings, committee hearings, markups, floor activity, and similar actions at the state level, I have learned to process policy information for key factors and ways to find alternate paths to solutions.

## Purpose of the Toolkit

In my work in both policy and politics, I have seen a gap in interactions from career lobbyists, campaign consultants, and well-meaning constituents. This gap has become alarming in an academic climate where we are witnessing factually accurate history hidden or watered down so much that it lacks its true meaning. Noting this gap in lobbying efforts, this toolkit allows me to share some of my knowledge in support of those striving to gain academic freedom. The goal of this toolkit is to empower professors, university professionals, college students, and academic freedom advocates from the continual pressure to weaken academic freedom. While the focus on academic freedom is mainly in higher education spaces, the ramifications of the weakening of academic freedom are impacting children far from any college campus.

## Friends & Interviews

My years of experience and the network that it created have provided me with the ability to have remarkably frank conversations with insiders. In Florida and Congress, with these conversations being off the record, participants were able to give straightforward answers without the concern for potential backlash. In all this allowed me to interview over 30 individuals, these individuals include state legislators, personal and legislative staff at both the state and federal level, state- and federal-level lobbyists, state- and federal policy advocates, student leaders from Columbia University, and student advocates from other universities.

## Why Florida & Texas

While Florida is personal to me, having worked in both chambers of the legislature and being a double graduate of Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, the inclusion was not because of my familiarity with the city. I selected a focus on Florida and Texas because they are the second and third most populous states in the country, and both states have had a Republican governor since the 1990s and have the Governor's party controlling the legislatures. This political environment has allowed Florida and Texas to test major policy initiatives at the highest level outside of the federal government. We see these efforts in other spaces in academics, including school choice and school tax credit programs. Not only do the two states move Republican policy through size and attention, but they also control the Republican path to the White House. Since George H. W. Bush was elected President in 1988, the only other Republican presidents, George W. Bush and Donald Trump, have had ties to either Texas or Florida. And beyond the individuals who became President, Florida has fielded multiple Presidential hopefuls in recent years, including Secretary Marco Rubio and the following governors: Jeb Bush, Rick Scott, and Ron DeSantis. With Florida and Texas leading the way on Republican policy and leadership, they are critical to watch as we discuss academic freedom.

## 2. What's at Stake

First, I want to thank the University of California System and the National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement for this opportunity. As a non-academic, I have not had to write anything near this length since I was a graduate student, researching public policy in Florida.

When I originally applied for this fellowship, I aimed to address academic freedom, focusing on supporting professors, both tenured and non-tenured. My thoughts on academic freedom have led me to consider what can be taught at a university if professors do not possess the freedom to teach in ways that may conflict with the desires of the state government or the President.

But the more I began to write, I realized that the individuals I am most concerned about are the low-income students at public universities. Depending on their state, they may never learn factually accurate history. With the actions that the Trump administration has begun to take against international students who disagree with the foreign policy of the United States, even if it is merely written opposition, my work has been pushed to review the perspective of the students.

As we see the Make America Florida efforts, you must have increased concerns for the individuals in our military academies. These individuals are committing that may result in the ultimate sacrifice for the nation, yet we are seeing attacks on what they are taught and what they can read in their libraries.

The concern that will always live in my head is for the safety and the continual success of our nation's Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). While in meetings with Secretary McMahon, she has not led on to attacking HBCUs, but with the attacks on the 1890 Scholars program on the very first day of the administration, you cannot say that the safety of HBCUs is permanent.

HBCUs were built from a place of necessity in a country where Black people had few rights and in many parts of the country could not attend the predominant university in their state. The disregard for Black students was so great that, while the Morrill Act of 1862 created most of our nation's Land Grant Universities, southern states undermined the goal of the first Morrill Act so much that there was a need for the second Morrill Act of 1890. Because southern states refused to admit Black students at their land grant universities, the act provided at the tail end of the Reconstruction period a federal commitment to the establishment of Black Land Grant Universities. These 1890 land grant universities have since been critically underfunded compared to their states' 1862 LGUs, which these students' grandparents and great-grandparents were not permitted to attend.

As these HBCUs have long carried the torch of civil rights in their states, with many of the schools being in their state's capital city, they have long served as rally points for civil disobedience, advocacy, and protests. But with the now national urge to eliminate all painful aspects of United States history, how can a student at a public HBCU learn the same truths that their parents and grandparents knew?

With HBCUs being disproportionately located in the South, we will see school after school forced to eliminate the truths about their respective states' dark history and the federal government.

Sadly, the only bright spot for HBCUs is that alums have long known that they are responsible for carrying forward their state's torrid history, as many of the state governments have acted in ways to destroy or hide the history of the state. In Florida, students saw books like "Their Eyes Were Watching God" being pulled from their bookshelves. While the book is fictional, it discusses a black experience in Florida that few others discussed, with parts of the state retaining the same nicknames referenced in the book to this very day, "The Muck". The book also introduces those who are not familiar with Central Florida to Eatonville. Without books like those from Zora Neale Hurston, we would lose aspects of our black history and American history.

With this ongoing purge of painful history, there is the question of whether Florida will move to ban "Lift Every Voice and Sing." With the application of SB 266, the lyrics of this song may be deemed non-compliant and incendiary, and the song itself may be seen as not a part of the Western canon. While this song has been considered the national anthem by the NAACP in 1919 more than a decade before President Wilson signed the law to make the Star Spangled Banner the national anthem in 1931, Florida's laws could lead to its exclusion from classes like FAMU's Afro-American Music class which the state required that it is updated. That is the painful reality that a song written by a Floridian, James Weldon Johnson, first performed in Florida may be under the threat of attacks from the state. Then there is the question of whether the history of the school, that it was first performed, is also deemed non-compliant. That school was Florida Baptist Academy, which eventually moved to Opa-Locka and became Florida Memorial University due to racism in Northeast Florida. The reality is that attacks on academic freedom on college campuses will erase history and progress, and those first impacted will be those who have suffered the most from the lack of progress.

## 3. Agitate! Agitate! Agitate!

To begin any political endeavor, you must understand your end game. Your goal is not always to make friends and reach an agreement. Your goal may be making friends, getting politicians to agree with your policy position, delaying political actions, lessening the blow of a disastrous policy, or defeating questionable politicians in elections.

But to start any discussion about political or policy movement in the face of a political establishment that has not only shown itself to be adversarial but that proudly proclaims its adversarial relationship to the issue, you must rethink your tactics.

So, "Agitate! Agitate! Agitate!" as Frederick Douglass proclaimed in Ireland in the presence of one of his idols, Daniel O'Connell. While most of America may be versed in Douglass's name, I fear few are versed in Frederick Douglass's efforts as an agitator. He worked to change the thought process in the United States and its government to end the practice of chattel slavery in the United States. Frederick Douglass was born an enslaved Black man in Maryland, later escaping this cruel system. As Frederick Douglass proclaimed, "Agitate! Agitate! Agitate!" in Ireland, he was still considered a fugitive slave by the United States of America.

So, no matter where you are or who you are in front of, think about Frederick Douglass's will to fight against political systems that failed him while he knew that his freedom was at risk every time he talked.

# 4. Tracking Tools

## Candidate Tracker

Use this table to compare candidates based on their likelihood of winning and stance on academic freedom.

| Candidate Name | Cook PVI | Position on Academic Freedom | Friend or Foe? |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

## Advocacy Tracker

Use this table to help track your advocacy actions with elected officials and their offices.

| Elected Official Name | Action Type | Contact Made? | Response Received? | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Email / Phone / Meeting | Yes / No | Yes / No | |
| | Email / Phone / Meeting | Yes / No | Yes / No | |
| | Email / Phone / Meeting | Yes / No | Yes / No | |
| | Email / Phone / Meeting | Yes / No | Yes / No | |
| | Email / Phone / Meeting | Yes / No | Yes / No | |
| | Email / Phone / Meeting | Yes / No | Yes / No | |

## Four Quadrants

There are various ways to break down the different universes, but a simplified way is to break down politicians into the following four quadrants:

Both in the Capitol and the Streets, politicians and the public can be sorted into these quadrants.

1. Strong Friend
2. Weak Friend
3. Weak Foe
4. Strong Foe

At the ballot box, you have to look at three different quadrants. Where does the politician rank in the Capitol and streets quadrants? Their location in the prior quadrants and their likelihood of winning determine if you should become active in their election. With elections, you should break candidates into the following categories:

1. Safe Seat – Friend
2. Weak Seat – Friend
3. Weak Seat – Foe
4. Safe Seat – Foe

While a loud foe may be annoying, if they are in an extremely safe seat, you would be wasting resources if you actively campaign against them. They could be the worst member you have met, but if they have a 99% likelihood of winning re-election, move on. But if a weak friend is in a weak seat, you should prioritize helping them stay in office, as their continued tenure is a valuable safeguard for academic freedom if the alternative is a foe of academic freedom.

And with electors, you should break them down on an election-by-election basis, as primary voters are different from Presidential general election voters, which are different from midterm general election voters. So you will use your resources to break them up into these quadrants quickly:

1. Support & Likely Voter
2. Support & Turnout Voter
3. Opposition & Likely Voter
4. Opposition & Turnout Voter

You typically avoid spending campaign funds on electioneering activities that would reach individuals in strong opposition to your goal, electing candidates who support academic freedom, and who are unlikely to vote. In this guide, I would avoid campaigning to those in quadrant 4, "Opposition & Turnout Voter"; there is little upside. While I know that a Civics teacher might read this, that is okay,

I'm not a Civics teacher, I want to win races. Since I want to win races, promoting voting is not always the end goal, as creating opposing votes is just dumb. On the other end of the spectrum, you should not spend money on supporters who are likely voters. The goal is to get these certain votes to the polls for as little as possible. Campaigns would prefer for these voters to go vote on the first day of vote by mail or early voting, whichever comes first, as that would free up additional resources to address quadrants 2 and 3. No matter how you arrange your campaign, in the end you will attempt to persuade quadrant 3 and then try to turnout quadrant 2.

# 5. Essential Resources

## 5.1 Congress

### Floor activities

What is happening on the floor of the House today
https://www.congress.gov/on-house-floor-today

What is happening on the floor of the Senate today
https://www.congress.gov/on-senate-floor-today

What is happening on the floor of the House this week
https://docs.house.gov/floor/

### Committee Activities

What committees are meeting this week and when
https://www.congress.gov/committee-schedule/weekly

### House Authorizers

Education & Workforce Committee
Republicans - https://edworkforce.house.gov
Democrats - https://democrats-edworkforce.house.gov

Note that the name of the committee will likely change to Education & Labor in the 120th Congress, as that is the name that Democrats call the committee, and with the likelihood of Democrats regaining power in the House, the committee's name will change, and so will the website. The parties switch between what they call the committee and the controlling party, who takes the default name.

If Democrats take the House in the 120th Congress (from January 3, 2027, to January 3, 2029)

https://EdLabor.House.gov

## House Appropriators

House Committee on Appropriations' Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (also called LaborH)

**Republicans**
https://appropriations.house.gov/subcommittees/labor-health-and-human-services-education-and-related-agencies-119th-congress

**Democrats**
https://democrats-appropriations.house.gov/subcommittees/labor-health-and-human-services-education-and-related-agencies-119th-congress

## Senate Authorizers

Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee (HELP Committee)
https://www.help.senate.gov

## Senate Appropriators

Senate Committee on Appropriations' Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies

https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/subcommittees/labor-health-and-human-services-education-and-related-agencies

## Research Information

Publicly accessible CRS Reports
https://www.congress.gov/quick-search/crs-products?qs_expand=true

CBO Cost Estimates
https://www.cbo.gov/cost-estimates

Department of Education – Inspector General Reports
https://oig.ed.gov/reports/list

GAO reports
https://www.gao.gov

## 5.2 Marches/Rallies/Protests

SHUT THE FUCK UP
From the National Lawyers Guild – Detroit & Michigan Chapter
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWEpW6KOZDs&t=22s

Protesters Rights
From the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
https://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights/protesters-rights

## 5.3 Campaigning

### 5.3.1 Voter Data

#### Florida

**Price:** Free
Florida will send you a DVD every month with the voter data if you register with the state.
https://dos.fl.gov/elections/data-statistics/voter-registration-statistics/voter-extract-request/

#### Texas

**Price:** Estimated Cost of $1279
Texas, like many other states, charges for its voter file. The United States Election Assistance Commission estimated the total cost at $1,279 (in 2020).
https://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/forms/pi.pdf

#### Other States

National Conference of State Legislatures
https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/access-to-and-use-of-voter-registration-lists

#### United States Election Assistance Commission

https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/voters/Available_Voter_File_Information.pdf

### 5.3.2 Data Resources

#### Senate Race Ratings – Cook Political Report

https://www.cookpolitical.com/ratings/senate-race-ratings

#### House Race Ratings – Cook Political Report

https://www.cookpolitical.com/ratings/house-race-ratings
https://x.com/redistrict
https://x.com/CookPolitical

#### Florida-focused political insight and data

Matthew C. Isbell – MCIMAPS
www.MCIMaps.com
https://x.com/MappingFL

### 5.3.3 Specialized Tools

#### Robodial

https://www.robodial.org

## 5.4 Additional Campaigning Tools

I have included Robodial by name solely because of years of experience with them, and they delivered reliable results every time, every election cycle. On top of being reliable, Robodial is cheap and can be used by even the smallest of campaigns. In most cases, I suggest using the bundled tools; they cost more than the lowest price point you find, but you usually see benefits from the built-in integration, through increased functionality or ease of use. With the added benefits, you will likely recoup any additional cost in a reduction of campaign hours needed to reach the same outcome. On the lower end of the campaign budget, you may use standalone programs to keep costs down, so you will keep your campaign's fixed cost down by avoiding cost-prohibitive software packages, but raise your variable costs to reach the outcome.

There are plenty of providers who will help break down the data, both voter and fundraising. And with data, each party has its favorites, as Democratic political operatives have worked on a version of NGP, NGPVAN, VAN, or Votebuilder since the 2000s. Now it is common to see Republicans use WinRed and Democrats use ActBlue for fundraising, and targeting consultants using L2 Data. The positives of using integrated campaign tools are that you are saving campaign hours, by using these services that will create, dial, and process call lists or design, share, and record field activities; you save time. With smaller races, you may be able to use the raw data, but if you are mounting a race in which either the state or national party is interested, they will ensure that you are using your party's standard campaign tools. The standardization ensures that they are able to track your performance and that they will not have to train their party staff in your specialized data processing techniques.

# 6. Introductory Emails to Offices

## But her emails

Ok, this section is not about "her" emails. But about your emails to elected officials and their staff. Your email to the staffer needs to be brief and direct. The congressional staffers on the legislative teams that you are attempting to reach deal with hundreds of emails a day, and during certain times of the year, it may go up to 500 emails a day. So, when you are sending these emails, please look to the art of brevity. I promise you that no one you are emailing wants to begin their discussion by reading your dissertation. The reality is that if you have to email them your ask, you are not important enough for them to read through your 15-minute read of an email. While this paper will be long, it is meant to be long; your email better be short.

Online, you can look at the in-building Dear Colleague letters that offices write. Most of these "letters" are extremely direct. Typically, you will see an ask, a deadline, a list of supporters, and the background. Staffers will also work to ensure that the ability of other staffers to take action is as easy as possible, providing as direct instructions as possible. In addition to brevity, staffers aim to make asks and actionable parts of the Dear Colleague quickly identifiable, either by bolding or placing them in a separate color from the remainder of the letter. These actions are not because all staffers want to write short requests, as the staffers likely worked for weeks, if not months, on that ask, and for some, it is the first time they have sent a Dear Colleague. They are short because they want action, and they know that if they are looking for other offices to act, brevity is key.

## Keep it Short

So, as you write your emails to staff, ensure that you look to brevity. You should practice changing your five-minute read to a one-minute read. Here is an example of a one-minute read and what can be included:

---

Hi, staffer's name,

My name is John Doe. I'm a sophomore at Generic State School. I live in Generic City, in the congressperson's district, and I would like to discuss academic freedom and education policy with you. Are you free on Thursday afternoon?

If Thursday works, please share it, and I will send a calendar invite. I prefer to meet in person, but I'm happy to share a Zoom link. If it is easier for you, I've also shared a Calendly link so you can confirm the meeting on your end.

Calendly Link

Jack Doe and Jane Doe, students in the congressperson's district, will join me. With increased presidential action, we have noticed a decline in academic freedom on campus. We want to discuss three bills that we would like the member to support that will help protect academic freedom: HR XXX1, XXX2, and XXX3. I've included a one-pager on each bill with staff contacts if your boss wants to cosponsor them. Based on our research, the congressperson has historically supported similar efforts with them cosponsoring HR XXX in the 118th Congress and HR XXX in the 117th Congress. Also, Congressperson Doe, with whom your boss led an education letter, is a cosponsor of the bills.

If you want background information on the decline of academic freedom, I've shared an American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) report and an American Association of University Professors (AAUP) publication.

Sincerely,
John Doe

---

1. A scheduling ask – meeting on Thursday
2. Identifies the meeting topic – academic freedom and education policy
3. Identifies that the email author and the two other participants are constituents, meaning they matter to the elected official's political future
4. Choice of meeting type – the offer of an in-person or virtual meeting
5. A quick way to confirm the meeting – calendly or other scheduling service link
6. Simplification of the meeting schedule – offering to send the calendar link

All that information was shared in the first 30 seconds of the read. And with the last 30 seconds of the email included:

7. The cause for the request – increased presidential action, decreasing academic freedom, resulting in the need for legislative action
8. The legislative asks – cosponsoring three bills
9. Simplified info on the asks – the provided one-pagers
10. A way for the staffer to act without a meeting – staff contact information to enable them to cosponsor the bill
11. Why would the elected official complete the asks – historic information on similar bills that the member cosponsored
12. Additional reasons why the member will complete the asks – a colleague with whom they penned a letter on a similar topic has cosponsored the bills
13. More info if wanted – the attached reports from credible sources on the topic

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As this ask is merely a sample, you can easily alter the email with the inclusion of a bulleted summary of the bills, additional information about organizations supporting the bills, some friendly banter if you have already built rapport with the staffer, and plenty of other items. Still, the purpose of the sample was to show that you can write an email that takes less than 30 seconds to read and can provide detailed requests in less than 60 seconds.

This push for brevity is because staffers will look at a poorly organized, wordy email that lacks clear asks, possibly in all bold or caps, with a mixture of fonts, and will be able to make a quick decision to skip the email.

I have written emails that only had one word and my signature; that email was straightforward, but I did not have an ask, just an answer that I was not budging from. I have also received a 9,000-word email. Do I know what was included in the 9,000-word email, truthfully, not even a sentence, as with my years of experience, I knew that the email was a non-starter.

# 7. Introductory Phone Calls to Offices

Suppose you are planning to make a call about academic freedom to your member of Congress. In that case, you should first identify where your member lands in the academic freedom policy support versus foe quadrants and campaign quadrants. The way you contact and interact with offices should differ based on the member you are talking to. If you are introducing yourself to the office of a member who is a stalwart of academic freedom (strong friend), your future asks are drastically different than if you are talking to a member who is a weak foe. Your end goal with the strong friend is to build on that friendship, provide them with messaging, legislation, and content to increase the security, reach, and visibility of academic freedom. While talking to a strong foe, your conversation is not necessarily to make a friend but more so to make them a weak foe. With the weak foe, your messaging can focus on the other things that the legislature or Congress could be accomplishing if they did not spend precious floor time on attacks on academic freedom. While you will not get into the most detailed parts of academic freedom in your introductory contact with an office, you still need to recognize your end goal before you make your first contact.

**Step #1 – Identify your member of Congress**
Identify your member of Congress; you can do that here.
https://www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member

Now you have the office, Washington D.C., office location of your member of Congress and your two senators.

Cold calling offices and expecting to have a lengthy discussion on the spot with senior staffers or members of Congress on demand will not result in success. There are better ways of getting to the end goal of discussing the importance of academic freedom with the staffer who covers the issue area.

**Step #2 – A planned call asking for legislative staffer contacts**
A viable alternative tactic is calling the office and speaking politely to the intern or staff assistant who answers the phone. You ask them which legislative staffers cover judiciary and education policy. The reason for the broad categories is that many offices separate issue areas based on the committee structure. You should provide these two policy areas as they directly correlate with the respective committees in the House and the Senate. You should use the lingo of the building as it helps get the correct answer quicker. You can then elaborate that you want to set up an introductory call or Zoom with them to discuss academic freedom on college campuses with the proper staffer in the office. This additional information is not needed in the sense of getting you the correct contacts, but it does two things that could improve the outcomes.

First, it tells the office exactly what issue you want to talk about. When that junior staffer is attempting to figure out who covers the area, they would also share that information, as it helps identify the proper staffer. So, it gets you the correct staffer as the issue areas may overlap between staffers. The person the junior staffer checked in with may have been the staffer you are attempting to reach, so now that the proper staffer knows precisely what you want to talk with them about. You must realize that on the phone with you will typically be an intern or staff assistant, the youngest, least experienced staffers in the office. These young staffers will not always know what you want, so be patient as they may have to ask a coworker. They will get back to you with the name or names, depending on the chamber and how the office divides issue areas. Now there are two remaining action items on this call.

**Step #3 - Secure policy staff emails**
In the House, the email will generally follow the pattern of first_name.last_name@mail.house.gov, and in the Senate, it usually is last_name.first_name@Senator_last_name.senate.gov. This is important as the person on the phone may say their email address is standard House, which means that. With the Senate, each staffer's email address includes their member's website, so Senator Alsobrooks's office email address would end with @Alsobrooks.Senate.Gov.

Now that you have made the request for the email addresses of the relevant staffers and confirmed them, you can move on to the last ask.

**Step #4 - Request 5 minutes of that policy staffer's time if they are available**
At this point, you already know who you need to talk to in the office. If that staffer is there, they likely know that you want to speak to them about academic freedom policy, as the junior staffer may have discussed it with them directly or someone else in the legislative team, and that legislative staffer has shared it with the proper legislative staffer.

So, making the ask for a quick five-minute chat, both frames an extremely short time, which is measurable and viewed as an extremely short meeting. It creates a thought in their head that if they give you this five-minute meeting, they will be able to check off the request for the introductory meeting. So, you are now giving them wins by shrinking the likely meeting time from a 15-minute or 30-minute meeting to a 5-minute meeting, which can easily result in 9 minutes. This also allows them to check off a future meeting that they may not have even taken in the first place.

Your win is that you got to the right person quickly. This call can be as short as three or so minutes or as long as 9 minutes. Remembering the nine-minute cutoff is essential, as unless you have built instantaneous rapport, cutting the meeting short of 9 minutes is essential, as it can help build trust. In this case, the trust is that you are not going to waste their time. Nine minutes is still short of 10 minutes, so it is easily in the 5-ish meeting mark.

**Step #5 (If Step #3 fails)**
If you are not able to identify the proper legislative staffer who covers academic freedom, you still have paths to identify the appropriate staffer.

In the Senate, you would use a service like Legistorm.com to help identify the correct staffer. Legistorm also works with the House of Representatives.

In the House, with only a handful of legislative staffers per member's office, you could get the correct person with only four emails.

If you are not able to identify the proper legislative staffer who covers academic freedom, you can utilize the quarterly statements of disbursements to identify the likely staffers. Hopefully there is no real world where you have to use a SOD, but if needed you can find the House's here – https://www.house.gov/the-house-explained/open-government/statement-of-disbursements.

With the House, you should be able to go through the disbursements to identify the correct legislative staffer, as there will be 3 to 6 staffers with a legislative title in an office.

## 8. Timely Meeting Requests

It is vital that when you go to legislative offices, you are there at the right time, making the proper ask. In the states, the legislative calendar dictates when most bills can be introduced; you must ensure that any bill introduction request is made during that timeline. If you see a bill coming to committee, you must be prepared to meet with the elected officials at that moment, not that you are getting prepared, but you miss your window to fight the bill in committee or offer perfecting amendments. Are you going to push for programmatic requests in the appropriations cycle that are supportive of academic freedom? Are you watching the appropriations committee's dear colleagues to ensure that you are timely? While many things in these bodies happen year after year, you have to ensure that you do not miss your windows of opportunity. In D.C., both parties have taken advantage of reconciliation to push through agenda items when they have both chambers and the White House. Did you get your language in during committee, hoping to avoid the Byrd Rule, or did you draft it for the floor so that it can survive the Byrd Rule? You have to be prepared for when it is your time to hurry up and wait.

## 9. Email and Phone Campaigns

Congressional offices attempt to remain responsive to outreach from their constituents, with the move from physical mail to electronic mail, offices work to respond to the emails. With email responses, offices draft either generic letters or issue-specific letters if they are getting multiple similar requests. Offices try to track information to ensure the member is as informed as possible; so they share correspondence reports with senior staff and the member, identifying the topics in which constituents have reached out about that week. I reference the email side of advocacy campaigns and not the phone part, because emails that go through the office's official constituent inbox are largely sorted and tracked into campaigns by the CMS systems like IQ and Fireside. While phone calls can be tracked, it requires additional efforts by junior staff and interns to track them properly. In addition, phone campaigns can be disruptive to office operations, so if you are attempting to make a friendly request, a nuisance-laden phone campaign could drive staff to oppose your request solely out of spite. In your efforts to garner positive support for academic freedom, a consistent email campaign enlisting a few hundred constituents sending emails every week or so will continue to register in the office and force the staff to investigate the matter. While a 1,000-email campaign in one week may result in a look that week, or the following week when the legislative correspondent shares the report, but without follow-up, the office will move on to the next topic.

## 10. Count the Damn Seats

Count the Damn Seats was not a part of my original thoughts in the creation of this toolkit. It was the direct input of a close friend, who was a seasoned legislative assistant, turned lobbyist. While we discussed other aspects of the toolkit, she spouted "Count the Damn Seats". The reality is that in many meetings, advocacy groups attempt to bring in 8, 10, 15, and sometimes over 20 advocates into the meeting. These groups are known frustrations for the elected officials' staffers, not necessarily because the groups are rude or anything, but because the operations demand to facilitate large groups. You walked into a state representative's office that has two chairs and a three-person couch. How can you think that your 10-person group will fit in the room comfortably with the elected official and their staffer? Or you come to Congress and want to bring your 30-person group into a congressional office, unless the member has been there for over a decade, it is doubtful they can even fit all of you in their office. In addition to now aggravating staff who have to attempt to work a miracle to accommodate your oversized group, you are just killing your meeting clock.

So, now you are in the office with 30 constituents, the member of Congress, and a few of their staffers.

When the clock started, you had 15 minutes or 30 minutes if you were lucky. Someone is going to be late with groups that large; they may be in the bathroom, which delays the meetings by a minute or two. Now you are at 28 minutes, now your group all have to walk into the room and shake the elected official's hand. Then they have to figure out who is sitting where, who needs to be at the table versus who can be near the table. You are down to about 23 or 24 minutes now. Now the member goes, "I am Congressperson John Doe, can you all introduce yourselves?" Now you are watching your time slip away so fast, but sadly so slowly. They go around the room one by one, introducing themselves, some with a little too much background. Even if you go through the group introductions extremely fast, and I mean 20 seconds each, you just lost ten minutes. So now you are at 14 minutes.

You have already lost half of your meeting. So, you now go into the issue's background, but someone wants to piggyback on the previous person's statement, and then another person chimes in. You are not even at your ask yet, but you are down to 11 minutes. You are rushing through your four asks, because you are splitting up the assignments to ask questions to the participants around the table.

Problem! The second constituent shared the wrong bill number; they just shared the 118th Congress bill number because they looked at last year's one-pager, while asking the member to sign on in the 119th Congress. So, that confusion must be worked through, and you are down to 8 minutes. Hopefully, you can rush through the last two asks in the next 3 minutes.

Why? It is picture time! And now the meeting is over.

Meetings like these are not the ones where big decisions are made. There is no path for that meeting to be truly productive, as so much time will be wasted, and everyone will want to chime in if an interesting topic is being discussed.

With such a large group of constituents, true insider sausage-making talk will not happen like it would if it were with a couple of lobbyists who are alums of the building.

The members and staff like seeing constituents; they are significant to the member, as they are the ones who decide the member's political future on election day. These large constituent group meetings do not provide the opportunity to develop complex policy outcomes. If you are attempting to effectuate change in government through meetings with legislators, shrink the crowd.

There is no need for more than six individuals in any meeting: the member, their staffer, and four from your side. If you have hundreds of people willing to come to the state capitol or D.C. to push an objective, you have already done a great job at organizing. But now you have to continue to organize, you have to place these individuals in small groups with clear roles and action items to ensure that you are getting results. Large groups are great for a picture, but not to make substantial changes during the meeting.

## 11. Actionable Asks

You do not realize how quick 30 minutes is in a meeting until you have gone through 30 minutes and achieved nothing. Advocacy efforts use varying skillsets to achieve varying goals. How you develop meeting strategy changes depend on location (district office or Capitol) and what you ask. Let's start with a Capitol asks around appropriations.

First, you must look at what your end goal is in the meeting. Are you there asking for an earmark, bill language, proviso language, report language, or programmatic changes? You need to know that, while the person you are meeting with will likely understand what you are asking for, unless your interests align, they are unlikely to create new work for themselves to achieve your goals. If you enter the room urging for the funding of the National Endowment of the Humanities professional development grants, do you know what silo they are located in? Are you there to support the grant funding levels, or are you trying to change the proviso language? You need to enter the room knowing what you are trying to do.

Now, you have to explain why you are pushing for this funding, essentially, why the member should care about it. This could be as simple as highlighting other members that take similar policy positions and are supporting the issue, you could highlight how programs have benefited individuals in their community, how they will benefit their community, or you can share with them a way that it will align with their policy positions.

So, in the same room, you can go in their ill-prepared and say "you need to support teaching the history of slavery," or you can say "In the upcoming appropriations bill, we would like you to support maintaining the FY25 funding level for the National Endowment for the Humanities grants and administration line. This funding line is in the Interior and Environment appropriations bill. Supporting this funding level is critical as it will deliver federal support to development and administration professional development programs for college professors like The Slavery and Early Modern Philosophy that Georgetown is hosting during the summer of 2025. In 2024, Professor Smith from the university in your district attended a similar program and discussed how it improved their work in the field. As of today, seven members in your delegation and 22 members in your (identify their most important caucus) have signed on in support as well."

It is the same message both times. Still, the latter, provides a reason to support the request – teaching of slavery and early modern philosophy, a direct ask – support current funding level, a path to action on that direct request – the funding is located in the Interior and Environment appropriations bill, a direct impact to an issue area they care about – teaching the history of slavery, a positive impact on their community – local professor attended a previous program and it benefited students in the community, and a sense of similar minds that support the effort – 7 members in the delegation and 22 in the caucus. The second ask would take about one minute and deliver the entire request. The first request is often the byproduct of ill-prepared meeting participants.

They could easily waste the entirety of a 30-minute meeting rambling about their priority without presenting anything actionable; their request often lacks a path, a direct request, an underlying goal, an identifiable action, reasons why the elected official should support the effort, or other key factors. Not only will this wasted meeting result in the failure to achieve the advocate's goals, but it will also lessen the likelihood of future meetings. Pointless meetings are pointless meetings, and those starting in a position of limited bandwidth attempt to eliminate them. Politicians and their staff want to deliver results, and to deliver results, you need actions. So, understand before you enter the room, do not waste time, prepare for the meeting, and ensure your asks are actionable and results-oriented.

## 12. Issue Experts are Welcome

As academics, you are walking into these meetings pushing for academic freedom, and the way you help the space is by becoming a trusted issue expert. This trust also helps build rapport. These overworked staffers and the members want information that makes them look smarter. And this is where you are able to help.

As discussed, members and staff want to gain back time, so as you become trusted, they will trust you for essential parts of their legislative activity. You can build their in-building messaging by working with legislative staff to help draft talking points for the member in committee or on the floor, draft questions they can ask witnesses in hearings, and strike the last word statements on bills crossing their paths in committee. Now you can help them with drafting legislation too, you can help by drafting messaging and perfecting amendments for legislators so they can become active in academic freedom, provide sample legislation for members to use to build momentum around academic freedom, and you can assist as an issue expert in giving the staff and member feedback on bill language they are drafting. The legislative assistance is genuinely appreciated, as there is no path for these staffers or even the members to become experts on all issues, so your assistance in helping them look like experts will be utilized. And at the state level, you may be their best and most trusted resource on academic freedom, as they do not have the same support that is available on the national level.

Be available!

Being available is not limited to being in the building, but also being available for town halls or capitol-adjacent events, as staffers want to lock down friendly, issue experts, with whom they build rapport for events. You being available, trusted, and smart is a plus. So, while you should never walk into the room attempting to lecture the legislative staff, your willingness to partner as an issue expert will be welcomed.

## 13. How to Help in Committee

Each member of Congress has a different way of using their five minutes in committee. Most have some combination of a statement and questions for the witnesses. As you help with legislative writing you should attempt to learn the member's voice, as the closer you get to the member's voice the more likely an office will use your words verbatim as they know that your talking points are factually accurate as you're an issue expert, and with your commitment to learning the member's voice make the likelihood of the member using your words greater, as their staff will not have to edit your work. Offices actively work with partner organizations or key constituents through formulating messaging and questions when needed. Still, well-prepared associations and lobbyists will give a 10-second snippet or a couple of potential questions for the hearing without request. And when associations are competing with other associations for the member messaging time, skilled operatives will improve the talking points or questions they provide by including direct references to the member's district, as it will enhance the clipped video that the member will use for social media.

## 14. Don't go in with Vague, Nuanced, or Incorrect Asks

Sean Carter once said "… It don't mean that he bright, because you don't understand him, it don't mean that he nice. It just means you don't understand all the bullshit that he write". This is an excellent blueprint of what often happens in meetings. Individuals come into meetings, pushing either ridiculous oversized asks, or pushing something that does not work in the building. So, you are requesting a state representative to submit a bill. Did you check to see where they are on their bill limit? Did you provide them with a partner state senator, so they do not waste a slot? Did you verify that they can even file a bill at that time, because there are limitations on all of these factors? Or did you just come in and say, you should file this bill? Did you ask a member to file an amendment, and the request is not germane to the bill? Are you in a house office, urging them to reject the confirmation of a Secretary of Education? If you go to these offices with improper, poorly thought-out requests, they will stop listening to your request. I have seen individuals who were supposed to be issue experts make improper requests. You can easily research past legislative sessions, hearings, markups, floor activities, and other similar actions to ensure that when you walk in the room, you are providing help as an issue expert, and not "that guy" coming in with improper requests.

# 15. Amendments

## Winning with amendments

Amendments provide members with the ability to suggest changes in legislation to either drastically alter legislation or make slight improvements to the bill. Typically, the minority party uses the amendment process to show a difference between the two parties by outlining the policy objectives of their party. Further discussed in dilatory tactics, the amendment process can be utilized to slow down legislation through a bombardment of amendments.

## Perfecting amendments

There is also a discussion around the support or opposition of perfecting amendments. A perfecting amendment is an amendment filed to improve a bill. But the issue that generally comes up is whether the minority party wants to support perfecting amendments. Supporting a perfecting amendment means you improve a bad bill, which you may still see as bad. Or do you only suggest amendments, which the majority party will reject, knowing that it was solely messaging? The reality is that if you are in a position where your party has zero control of the legislature or executive branch for years, there is value in pushing perfecting amendments. Think of it as you get punched in your gut, instead of the original plan to punch you in your face. Is it now a good bill? Still no, but did you prevent it from being worse? Yes. There is a need for more perfecting amendments when you are the minority without a path to delay, stop, or have a bill vetoed; you need to look at perfecting amendments.

## Messaging amendments

The minority party is often in a space with limited resources to stop a bad bill, or even to have their amendments identified as an improvement by both parties. So, a common tactic is to file messaging amendments. A single member of the body may implement this amendment strategy, but it is also common for a group of members to organize the amendment strategy. Will these amendments pass? Not likely. They may even be deemed dilatory and disallowed, but still, they allow the minority party to message on the issues with the underlying bill.

## Majority amendments: ambush tactics

While many see the amendment process as a path for the minority to engage in addressing bad legislation, it is often used by the majority to forcefully alter a bill in a fashion that does not allow the minority party even to know what changed. In Texas, Senator Creighton introduced a 13-page amendment shortly before a vote on the amendment was taken. What was the bill on, SB 37 – The destruction of academic freedom. He provided his colleagues with 10 minutes to review the amendment. This move is not rare; in Florida, this practice is regularly used in a less extreme way. Members may prepare to counter a bill for a week, build an action plan to address a nasty piece of legislation, and then wake up the morning of the hearing, and there is a Delete All/Strike All amendment drastically altering the bill language and the structure. So now the legislators in the minority have zero time to respond. This is a powerful strategy, as it denies minority input, but there are some in the majority who will push back as they do not care for the procedure.

## 16. Winning in the Streets

"The only thing they're going to be putting pressure on is the grass," said openly gay former Congressman Barney Frank regarding a Gay Rights March.

When I say winning in the streets, I'm referencing everything that does not result in direct governmental action. Courts make rulings, the Capitol makes laws, and Election Day helps determine the other two. But the streets are all those other things in between and around.

Former Congressman Frank once challenged gay rights advocates regarding their marching to advocate for gay rights. His focus was not an objection to them marching, but because he did not see a march as the best channel for their advocacy. The objection was because of the makeup of Congress and the White House being mainly supportive, so was the march to make them happy, or to get work done.

That was a different time with Democrats controlling the House, Senate, and having President Obama. In a situation where you oppose the House, Senate, and White House, what is the goal of your march?

Marches allow participants to enjoy their advocacy, but the effect is limited. First, you must look at the fact that those who are most likely to march enter the position from a place of lacking the resources to lobby effectively. In the study by Wouters and Walgrave, they discuss the effectiveness of protests. In their research, they identify two key findings that size and the unity of messaging of the protests matter the most in changing an elected official's position. Of the individuals who would be advocating for academic freedom on college campuses, the only group for whom this is likely the best tool would be college students. In general, they are not resource-rich, and they have a direct interest in supporting academic freedom.

While there is the ability to get college students on board with protecting academic freedom, there are two limitations that will come up: staying on message and the importance to the elected official. With large groups, keeping them on message is difficult, as many who will join a march may agree with one part of your message but are also there to promote their issue. If you are planning on protesting or marching, please know that you have to be able to keep control of the group and stay on message.

## Reaching critical mass

In Erica Chenoweth's research, she identified that for protests to be successful, they have to reach a critical mass of roughly 3.5% of the population actively protesting to make significant changes to society. In the United States, that would require that nearly 12 million people are actively protesting on this one key issue. Continuing with her study, she calculated that non-violent protests were twice as successful as violent ones.

## International Students

Please be cautious of what you do from 2025 to 2029; You will have to measure if an action is worth the risk.

## 17. Courts

Of the four spaces in this fight for academic freedom, I have nothing to say here in absolutes. This is not my space, and I know it. Still, this is one of the critical elements in the fight.

To the lawyers – MAKE IT MISERABLE!

You need to make life hell for the states and the federal government that limit academic freedom. Your role is to defeat or at least stall the systematic destruction of academic freedom today. With the two states of focus and the federal government all being in a position where one party controls the House, Senate, and the executive branch, civics limits what can be done at the Capitol. The next realistic changing point for the three focuses is January 2027, but until then, we need you to fight.

## 18. Be the Bigger Asshole

This is most definitely a byproduct of years working in politics and policy in Florida. But often you have to be the bigger asshole. You have to understand that you cannot persuade everyone. Some of these elected officials will always be against academic freedom. Sometimes you cannot change people, so you must accept it. Still, some of them choose to be assholes and have very few redeeming qualities so you meet them where they are, and you become the bigger asshole.

# 19. Running for Office

If you find yourself reading this paper and determine that you must run for your state legislature or Congress, you have to follow the rules to run for office. Even the slightest mistake may cost you. President Obama benefited from the rules by utilizing election laws to clear his state senate primary in 1997, resulting in a path for the future president. While the rules punished Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries when he was drawn out of the district he ran in 2000 because of redistricting, leaving Leader Jeffries outside of the district in 2002.

## Federal Races

For federal races, you have both the state and federal layers to comply with. So, if you are running for a federal race, you will have to abide by the rules of the Federal Election Commission (FEC). To start your path to running, you should start here.

While complying with the FEC's guidance, which mainly includes finance and electioneering rules, as a federal candidate, you also have overlapping state guidelines. The state guidelines provide you with the path to being on the ballot, early voting and vote by mail days, key dates outside of "election day" (the Tuesday next after the first Monday in November), including primary or run-off election days.

## State Races

With state races, you can primarily focus on state statutes and guidance. Local races can have local government influences, further limiting aspects of a local campaign, including limitations on donations. At the same time, some jurisdictions provide guidance that further expands the voter universe, such as efforts to allow non-citizens to vote in local races in compliance with federal law.

Florida Secretary of State – Division of Elections
https://dos.fl.gov/elections/candidates-committees/qualifying/

Texas Secretary of State – Texas Ethics Commission
https://www.ethics.state.tx.us/resources/cf/StartingYourCampaign.php

## 20. AI and Elections

It is 2025, and AI is all around us. So you have to assume that AI is being used in multiple aspects of the campaign process. If you are using it in your personal life, you should realize that so are others. In campaigns, this currently looks like perfecting speeches or refining talking points. But as AI becomes more commonplace in our society, we are seeing businesses looking at using AI for electioneering. With AI, campaign consultants are able to compile your voter data with layer after layer of other aspects of your life to create highly personalized microtargeted ads. The following steps will be utilizing AI to build out field activities, as it is conceivable that you can drop a voter file into the upcoming GPT-5 or GPT-6, identify your goals, and AI delivers the output. I could see the command going something like this:

- Create 3-hour canvassing maps
    - with directions
    - houses sorted by side of the street
    - for 15 pairs of canvassers
    - showing only households with at least one voter who voted in at least two out of the last five, but no more than four of the last five general elections
    - based on publicly available voter information, identify messaging that would be best suited to persuade them to support my candidate, utilizing my candidate's public remarks and website data

While using AI for campaign data can be done in one-off designs that utilize open-source databases to share data, I do not see it as the likely future. With AI, new campaign technology providers will compete for market share, and current all-in-ones will utilize it. This utilization of AI will also be used in donor research; it is feasible for AI to help estimate what a donor will be willing to give a candidate and what could motivate them. With the increased ability to data mine, AI can process data, creating more and more accurate targeting.

When you are working on advancing candidates who are supporters of academic freedom, understand that while you may dislike certain technologies, that does not change their usage around you. You have to compete with the tools that are given to you, and when your opponents have access to the same tools, you cannot just put your head in the sand and wish campaigns reverted to a "better" time. People continue to complain about robocalls, targeted campaign text messages, and other ads, but campaigns use them so that you can complain about AI, but understand campaigns will use it.

## 21. Targeting

While Cambridge Analytica drew headlines for its actions, campaigns across the nation were microtargeting in less scrutinized ways. Microtargeting can help to maximize campaign dollars and improve goal outcomes, so campaigns continue to do it. Imagine mid-October, and you have identified a block of 3,000 voters who you calculate will be voting early, but you are uncertain whether they support the state representative candidate who will fight for academic freedom, what do you do? Do you go and try to buy radio or TV spots, you are too late and too costly. Next, you look at a digital billboard, but are you hitting your targets? Probably not, and you cannot track it. But with microtargeted ads, your price point is solely based on those 3,000 individuals, and you can easily track the performance of the advertisement. Now in the other side of town you have 500 guaranteed votes, but they are not frequent voters and live in a community that if it is overstimulating could activate 1,000 votes against you, still your voters live within 10 minutes of the early voting location, and the early voting location is open until 7pm all week. How do you remind just those voters, because their neighbors are against you? You cannot put up digital billboards, TV ads, or radio ads; all are cost-prohibitive and could result in a net loss in votes. But with microtargeting, you can ensure that your turnout messaging is solely going to your targets, you can remove them from the targeted list the day after they vote, using data in Florida, allowing near real-time cost reduction.

Some individuals say to talk to everyone, they are all important, but those are usually the candidates, and that is because they have to say and should believe that. But the campaign operatives behind them know that targeting goes well beyond microtargeted ads. Every aspect of a campaign is targeted, even with the most extensive campaigns, resources are essential and limited. The targeting in a campaign includes the standards that you think about, such as door knocking, phone banking, and texting lists, but it goes well beyond that. With a campaign, seasoned campaigners and candidates will use targeting guidance to determine office, rally, event, and fundraising locations. When you choose your office locations, can your volunteers get to them easily and conveniently, or did you place them in a community that primarily supports your opponent? Your office location can easily cost a campaign hundreds, if not thousands, of volunteer hours. You are having a Get Out the Vote (GOTV) rally to ramp up turnout. Did you plan it in the right neighborhood? Well, it would have been a better use of your campaign resources if you had held it in a neighborhood about 20 minutes north of where you had it. Where you are having the rally is approaching your calculated vote max and does not need any GOTV resources, but that neighborhood across town is under-resourced, and the vote data shows you can create 2,400 votes in the neighborhood rather than the estimated 400 where you had the rally. But because you did not have the rally where it was needed, you did not motivate your volunteers in that neighborhood, the local preachers did not have a GOTV event to take their congregation to, and you spent the same resources to gain far fewer votes. Every aspect of a campaign is targeting, down to when you target different voting groups.

## 22. Social Media - Meet the People Where They Are

While academics in general produce published work, in your fight for academic freedom, that is not the path to move your agenda forward. I know that sentence is ironic, in such a long paper. Still, I can get higher engagement on academic freedom from a targeted Instagram post than I will get from all my writing. There is a fondness among many to push policy messaging through think pieces, op-eds, and other long-form writing. I understand it as you get to test your writing ability and identify your capabilities in storytelling, persuasion, and issue relevance.

But that does not matter!

You are not talking to a crowd of solely academic freedom experts, who are actively engaged in the recent findings in the field. You are trying to build support from an electorate that is likely nowhere near as focused on the issue as you are. While op-eds are fun to write, if your objective is to push the message and build support, you would be better off making a TikTok video.

## 23. Advocacy Outside of the Capitol

In the early 1990s in Florida, two Black Caucus members pushed through legislation to include Black history at the state level. But what was missing in many of these textbooks was actual Black people, and this was not limited just to the history books; it was across the curriculum. Then, state Representative Frederica S. Wilson, who prided herself on the work she did with her brother in Miami-Dade County to push the teaching of Black history in Florida, saw a void at the state level. She looked at ways to implement her goals via bill language, but there was no path forward. So instead of giving up on the fight, she went directly to the publishers and worked with them to show more Black people in their books. Was a law needed to accomplish this goal? No! All that was needed was the will to change a situation, the audacity to believe that you are right, and the resolve to see the process through. Members across the political spectrum work to get stuff done outside of bill language, as there are often paths that garner the same or greater success without going through the legislature or Congress.

## 24. Support Winners (Avoiding Political Grifts)

When utilizing your resources, whether money or time, you should ensure that you are not wasting them on non-viable campaigns. I cannot say that all the actors in some of these non-viable campaigns that are raising millions of dollars are grifting; some honestly think they can win, but some of their consultants see a paycheck.

THEY NEVER WIN!

Yes, there are members of Congress, State Legislators, and Governors that you may hate with a passion, but does your allocation of your resources to their opponents have a tangible outcome that will improve academic freedom? No.

So, stop wasting your time and money on these races.

This section came up shortly after President Trump's election, when I saw millions being spent on the Democratic side in Florida's 1st and Florida's 6th Congressional districts. Before the races were even announced, I told everyone who asked, from elected officials to interns, that they were a waste for Democrats even to imagine winning.

You have to use resources on winnable races, both at the state and federal levels. The most straightforward path to identify winnable races is by looking at past performance data for the district. This can be done by doing an analysis of past election cycles, turnout models, and predicting based on current political winds.

The easiest way to identify seats in play at the federal level is by using sources like the Cook Political Report. Based on Cook Political Report's data on June 10th, of all the House races across the country, Democrats have 41 seats to protect, with 10 toss-up, 12 lean democrat, and 19 likely democrat seats. It is fair to assume that the likely Democratic seats are relatively safe in a mid-term where the Democrats do not control the White House. In contrast, Republicans have to protect 28 seats, nine toss-up, nine lean republican, and 10 likely Republican. With President Trump being in the White House, it is expected that you will see the House turn Blue in January 2027, and it is conceivable that 10 to 20 House Republican seats will be lost to Democrats.

If you want to be active in 2026, use your resources to support an at-risk friend of academic freedom or oppose an at-risk foe of academic freedom. Please do not use it to go after a foe of academic freedom in a safe seat.

# 25. Structured Advocacy

Winning in the Capitol is built on a host of factors working together to ensure success. I include the executive branch in the space, because if you have a friendly administration, there are rare chances that you are fighting in the Capitol, you won your fight on election day. Fighting in the Capitol relies on a blend of brevity, blustering, compromise, a keen understanding of the legislative calendar, understanding how the building's schedule, successful meeting timing, proper meeting planning, winning with amendments, delivering successful asks, being an issue expert, dilatory tactics, counting the seats, building rapport, and never lying.

## Building Rapport

You should not expect the elected officials and their staffers to trust you on day one. Why would they? When you enter these rooms, you must work to build rapport quickly. Some skip building rapport and buy access through campaign donations. But even with the donor class, they tend to be around for years, thus building rapport. You can build rapport by working with the state legislator's staffers when they are not in session. They may have some questions and want to build out a potential bill for the next session, or want to be more versed in the issue of academic freedom. Be available! They will remember your willingness to be available when you ask for a meeting.

If you live in Austin, Tallahassee, or Washington, D.C., you can frequent the same bars as the members and staff. At every level, staff participate in camaraderie-building intramural sports. You could watch the kickball league in Tallahassee or some soccer in D.C. If you are consistent and friendly, you will be able to build rapport with the staffers. But if the only time they see you is when you need something from them, they will view you as a transactional relationship.

## Don't Lie

This one item could cover the entirety of the toolkit. If you lie to an elected official or a staffer, assume the relationship is dead. And I mean, dead forever. While politicians and staffers know how to dance around the truth in public, in private, they are direct and often brutally honest. They may omit details in internal discussions, but they avoid lying because they know that will stop future conversations.

During my fellowship, I have had conversations with over thirty state or congressional staffers. When they discussed people lying to them, the response was consistent: they were dead to them. I have seen some staffers with pictures and names on the walls of their offices of people on their shit list. If you lie, you will be on the wall!

Do not only assume that the one relationship is dead, but also that your ability to advocate in either your state legislature or in Congress will die fast. You must understand that staffers know each other.

At the state level, many of these staffers will bond with their colleagues during the legislative session, often sharing housing as they maintain their permanent residency elsewhere in the state. In Congress, junior staffers often share apartments.

Not only do they bond, but depending on office structure, many share a common office space, as occurs in Florida. So now you have lied to one of them, please know that they will tell their friends in the common office space not to trust you. And like that, your name is trash. It is a rapid process, so if you plan to lie to staff or members, you must understand that your name and, more importantly, your word will be deemed worthless.

Now, if you have decided that you can lie to a staffer, solely because they are staff and not a member, please recognize that staff often become members. On the Democratic side in Congress, the dean of the Florida delegation, Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz, was a Florida House staffer. On the Republican side of the State Senate, Senator Alexis Calatayud was a Florida House staffer. So, if a lobbyist had lied to these two members while they were state House aides, they could ruin their relationships with the Florida House, the Florida Senate, and Congress for generations, with just two lies.

# 26. The Art of Brevity

Brevity is the most crucial tool in this kit. While this section shares its name with Grant Faulkner's book "The Art of Brevity," it is not a reference to it. But while it is not a reference to the book, it shares parts of the same goal, identifying how to share the same story with fewer words. Congressional staffers and members regularly draft statements with strict time constraints, they draft one-minute speeches on the floor, formulate a statement and question package that maximizes the usage of their five minutes in committee, or the time allotted to them in a major floor debate, maybe two minutes. So, while communication directors could easily reword legislative writing and result in a 15-minute speech, the goal usually is the opposite. It is the regular squeezing of phrasing to get more impact out of each word, while allowing proper timing and control of the speech. So, members and their staff are skilled at regularly practicing efforts in brevity, resulting in concise messaging that will resonate with their target audience. So, this is where the question lands on the audience: why would the recipient of your writing want a long-winded statement that is essentially empty of action or impact when you could provide them a more impactful message with fewer words?

## The Art of Brevity (using the art of brevity)

Members and their staffers do not want to read your think pieces. So, write smart, concise, and impactful messages. It will improve your outcomes and reach.

# 27. The Art of the Bluster

Charlie Sykes discusses the Art of the Bluster in his Bulwark article discussing then former President Trump's blustering in a Manhattan courtroom in November 2023. In the article, he outlines a belligerent politician whose words do not result in any action, just more words. In that courtroom, President Trump went on for hours. Is this action at all shocking? No.

Blustering is an art form that seasoned politicians can do with zero notice and little effort. They have developed this ability from years and years of practice, if not decades and decades. At the federal level, they know that many of their legislative actions will never become laws, so they have to identify ways to grandstand and draw attention to their concepts, even the far-fetched concepts. They hold press conferences announcing this grand action that they are moving forward, but that just never happens. They go on the Sunday morning shows and proclaim dire consequences if the nation does not follow their lead; they assert that their positions are the only path forward for our country, and those who disagree with them are drastically wrong. Politicians are routinely criticized for doing this, but there is no reason for them to stop because it works for their business.

You have to view politicians in the full spectrum of who they are and their ambitions. So, railing against a concept, knowing that you will never successfully alter it, could be the winning solution the official wants. Other times, it is charging on by pushing a policy, while knowing that there is no path to passage. Is there an action?

No, but the politician still won, as they got the wanted press hits.

The reality is that politicians are not always blustering, sometimes just a loud boast. Congress and state legislatures across the country are full of bills solely designed for them to make noise; they are messaging bills. The sponsors know that they have no path to passage, but they want to draw attention and yell how perfect this concept would be if it became law. So, they boast, and they bluster.

When your reality is limited because you only control a single chamber while the opposing party controls the other chamber and the executive branch, you are severely limited in what legislative action you can accomplish. You might be able to force through a hyper-partisan bill through your chamber. The track of the bill will provide opportunities for press conferences, news spots, campaign fundraising, and support from the hardliners. Still, you only control one chamber, so you know it will never become law.

What else can you do? You bluster a little bit with the powers that you do have to make it appear that you have more powers than you do. You fire off a letter to the Executive branch, to the leader of the organization that you are frustrated with, and to a litany of other organizations to continue the story. While it is blustering, it serves different purposes at the same time. Politicians often use it to continue

a story; when it is somewhere between something a politician is passionate about and something they see as an opportunity, continuing the story remains beneficial.

While you may not have the power to enact change in your state legislature because of party imbalance, that does not limit you from being loud. You can walk through how horrible legislation is through email blasts, press releases, public statements, press conferences, news appearances, and so many other paths. Unfortunately, in many states, this may be your only option, but it is still an option. Politicians avoid being on the "wrong" side of an issue, so blustering and boasting can help in drawing attention to your argument.

Never fear being wrong today, if you know you will be right tomorrow.

If you have a moral conviction in support of or against an effort, you should stay true to your convictions. While this position may result in short-term political damage, if you are in a position in which you can weather the damage, you may end the day as the only correct person in the room.

The best example of not fearing being wrong today, when you have a moral conviction counter to the mainstream, is that of then-Congresswoman Barbara Lee, for those who do not know the story of Barbara Lee and her most consequential vote ever. It was September 14, 2001, three days after 9/11. Barbara Lee watches as the House of Representatives moves forward with House Joint Resolution 64, Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF of 2001). This resolution provided President George W. Bush the following power "the President is authorized to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons." Now it is time to vote, the results of Roll Call vote 342 in the 107th Congress, 1st session on the passage of H.J.Res. 64, 420 members voted Yea and one vote Nay, Congresswoman Barbara Lee. To have the conviction in your heart that while you know the pain you may face, you know something is wrong and you cannot accept it, that is courage. As Ms. Lee shared with the LA Times in 2021, that vote was the "most difficult vote" she cast in her career in Congress. But she knew that while the country was mourning a terrorist attack that changed how we viewed safety in our country, transformed federal agencies, and lead to the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, "the last thing the country needed was to rush into war after 9/11 or ever, without proper deliberation by the people". The joint resolution essentially gave President Bush the power to play FAFO with anyone he thought had done anything that led to 9/11. Barbara Lee stood firm in the face of death threats, insults calling her a terrorist and traitor, and those who questioned her continued political viability.

She stood alone, knowing that it was the hardest vote, but she trusted herself, her conviction, and her truth.

Hard decisions are called hard for a reason, but you must trust your moral convictions, and you must be willing to challenge others' views if they are at direct odds with your truths. This is a hard lesson, and the reality is that not all will survive re-election like Congresswoman Lee did. But her conviction was true; she lived with a tough decision, got re-elected, and recently won her race to become the Mayor of Oakland.

## 28. The Art of Compromise

There are very few times when an elected official gets precisely what they want and only what they want. The typical exception is a strong executive whose party controls the legislative branch. Outside of that scenario, that is just not how things get done; they can often inject their policy objectives into moving legislation, but most politicians cannot control the entirety of the complex bills. Politicians accept these limitations and find ways to win, often by placing their language in must-pass bills. Do these politicians support all aspects of these bills? Does that even matter? No, because they passed their language. To be clear, they will likely support the overall bill, but the minor detail does not matter to their political career. The reality is that in Congress, complex bills are tough to pass, so deals are made. To pass a bill in legislative bodies, it requires floor time, and floor time is scarce. In the House of Representatives, to pass a complex and divisive bill, depending on the track, you will start with committee hearings and then enter into a series of complex and often extremely long markups in the committee. Then you will go to the Rules committee for hours of debate on the bill and drafting the rule, and if it is an open rule, you get amendment after amendment. Then you have to go to the floor and debate the rule, and hope that it passes. And then you debate amendments. At this very point, even as a complex bill is being processed, side deals are being woven in a desire to limit floor time usage and complexity of the bill, so deals around en bloc amendments are being made. Next, you have to debate the bill and potentially overcome a motion to recommit. And then you have to repeat a similar process in the Senate. Now you are likely headed to the conference committee and hoping to leave with a passable bill. And finally, you hope that the bill that the two chambers agree upon has the support of the President.

The reality is that trades happen in those rooms. Hopefully, that is not shocking to anyone reading this, as that is compromise, and it is a healthy part of our democracy. In defensive postures, this is a place where you aim to limit the exposure of negative risks. This is where the ability to work across the aisle benefits a politician. So, when I say work across the aisle, I am not solely referring to centrists working together; there are so many pairings of interests from right- and left-leaning groupings.

## Example of Bipartisan Compromise: No Guns on Campus

A recent example of a cross-party line partnership was against guns on campus in Florida. In March 2025, Senator Ileana Garcia (R-Miami), joined the three Senate Democrats on the Criminal Justice Committee, Senators Mack Bernard (D-West Palm Beach), Carlos Smith (D-Orlando), and Jason Pizzo (Democratic Leader-Sunny Isles Beach) to defeat then State Senator (now Congressman) Randy Fine's Senate Bill 814 - Weapons or Firearms at School-sponsored Events or on School Property. The Republican-ran Criminal Justice Committee staff issued the following as a part of the summarization of the bill that the bill would change state law so "a person may lawfully carry a firearm on the property of any college or university, including, but not limited to, any dormitory or residence hall owned or operated by a college or university, and in any other location he or she is legally authorized to do so. A person may lawfully carry a firearm on the property of any college or university, including, but not limited to, any dormitory or residence hall owned or operated by a college or university, and in any other location he or she is legally authorized to do so." This bill was pushed through until Senator Garcia joined the Democrats to kill it; notably absent from that committee vote was Senator Corey Simon (R-Tallahassee).

# 29. Dilatory Tactics

Delay! Delay! Delay! When you are in the minority, oftentimes dilatory actions are the only path to "success." Often, the aim is not to win, but to slowly draw out the process so much that arriving at your opposition's end goal is so painful that they rethink how they go after success in the future.

## In the States

In Florida, we saw a generation of politicians who utilized a barrage of amendments to delay bills. Sometimes the efforts appeared as more entertainment than action, but they delayed bills. Delaying bills does not just create a timeline issue for the current bill; it makes a delay for future bills, either in committee or on the floor. Congressman Jared Moskowitz playfully used the amendment process against then fellow state House Representative Matt Gaetz. He sat in a State House where the likes of former Congressman Matt Gaetz were able to push through whatever legislation they wished, as the Republicans had complete control of the state government. In an effort that frustrated many of his Republican colleagues, Mr. Moskowitz would routinely introduce amendment after amendment, when Republicans attempted to beat him at his own game by introducing second-degree amendments to his amendment. But when that happened, he introduced his own second-degree amendments, resulting in each amendment becoming one of three amendments. In recent years, the Republican leadership in the Florida House of Representatives has begun utilizing House Rule 11.13 – Dilatory Motions to stop House Democrats from using amendments in a dilatory fashion. In Florida, there is currently no path for a Democratic-only filibuster in either chamber, with Republicans having supermajorities in both chambers. In addition to standard tactics, Republicans in Florida can speed up bills when they choose with their supermajority by eliminating the requirement for bills to be read on three separate days. As discussed in the Texas section, the ability to delay in the Texas Legislature is under continual assault, to the point where there is no path to a Democratic-only filibuster with the implementation of the 5/9 rule.

## In Congress

The Senate has many dilatory tactics, while the House has its dilatory motions and actions. In committee, members can offer endless amendments, and the volley of amendments will frustrate members on both sides of the aisle, as they all but know the outcome, but are forced to vote and vote. Committees have implemented electronic voting to speed up votes, neutralizing the dilatory nature of tens of amendments, as the vote will now take a minute or two, rather than the length of a drawn-out roll call vote. One of the tactics taken is the motion to adjourn; it rarely works, but it has the ability to aggravate other members, as it disrupts their day, which likely means disrupting their fundraising. If their goal is disruption and frustration, it is a successful tool. There is also the motion to recommit, which is a path to where the minority party wants additional time to say just how badly they view a piece of legislation. Yes, there is a real outcome if the MTR passes, but it is unlikely to pass. The dilatory nature of it is limited, as it may result in an additional 10 to 20 minutes of floor time used. But this

tactic is generally utilized for the messaging aspect rather than a dilatory nature. The most unique dilatory tactic of the United States House of Representatives is referred to as the "Magic Minute," as it is a custom of the House. It is a custom that essentially says that a speech offered by the Speaker, Majority Leader, or the Minority Leader will, no matter the actual time length, only be viewed as taking one minute of floor time. This tactic allows for the closest thing to a filibuster in the House of Representatives without an actual filibuster. In 2018, Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi took to the floor and spoke for over eight hours against Republican legislation, but for the matter of how much time her speech counted against the Democratic allotment of time in debate, one minute. In Ryan Kelly's article in Roll Call, he shares a statement from the House parliamentarian on this tactic: "It's the custom of the House to hear the leader's remarks."

# 30. Coordinated Advocacy

"The next Administration and Congress might also consider amending the HEA to remove accreditors from the program triad entirely" – Project 2025

"The Freedom from Indoctrination Act accomplishes three goals for public institutions of higher education: Requires that no student can be required to take a DEI/CRT course as part of their mandatory studies. " – Model state language from ALEC

The organizations pushing for the decline of academic freedom at both the state and federal levels are highly coordinated. While most think of Project 2025 as a new concept, the reality is that the coordinated Mandate for Leadership concept is now over 40 years old, with the first one being released at the start of President Ronald Reagan's first term. The Heritage Foundation has worked to ensure its coordination with countless other groups, resulting in a coordinated message. American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) has been consistently hosting state legislators for decades and has been able to orchestrate their language being signed into law across the country. The other benefit they are seeing from the coordinated advocacy is a single message, as a single message is much easier to deliver than 50 different messages from 50 different members of Congress.

There are left-leaning groups aiming to fill those voids, such as State Innovation Exchange (SiX), yet even with the strides that SiX is currently making, they are still decades behind ALEC. On the federal level, there are multiple organizations that are attempting to act as information clearinghouses, but there are few providing coordinated messaging. There is a need for additional coordination, as the left needs the same messaging clarity and coordination that has been built on the right through groups like the Heritage Foundation.

## 31. Fight!

The fight for academic freedom is not limited to one way, a group of fighters, or a platform. I recognize four ways to fight. Not all paths are immediate; following the laws takes time, as there are NO KINGS in America.

You can win in the courts, streets, Capitol, and on election day. You can divide, reclassify, and divide again, but those are the places that I will discuss action in the fight for academic freedom. Still, there is considerable overlap between the four spaces.

As I had both friends in the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021, and ones who lived between the locations where pipe bombs were found after January 6th. I want to be extremely clear in this section. No matter how I phrase a statement, no matter how animated or violent an action I reference sounds, at NO point do I condone a violent attack on anyone. You must outsmart, work, and think those who want to limit academic freedom in all four spaces.

## 32. Postface

While I want to end this by telling you that you cannot allow the actions of governments and leaders to consume who you are as a person, you are human. I cannot live in the same world as you all and pretend that governments do not have the power to cause harm, both physically and mentally.

You must not let it end your ability to move forward in thought, action, family, and love. You have to learn the ways of these political and policy machines and rage against them like Irvine's own Zack de la Rocha.

You cannot live in a position of believing that your academic freedom is apolitical. Your academic freedom is highly political; your knowledge and power as an informed electorate are the biggest threats to political power.

As I do not suggest political violence, I encourage you to use your intellect to remove those in the way of your academic freedom, build structures that support your liberties, and always teach the uncomfortable truths. As a descendant of generations of victims of chattel slavery in the United States of America, I will end this toolkit with a valediction that I think about far too often.

Relatively Conscious

Derron

# 33. APPENDIX: Research, Context, and Explanatory Notes

## 33.1 Check the Calendar

So with both state legislatures and Congress, there are times when members are at the Capitol and times when they are not. As the states, especially the two I am focusing on in this piece, have drastically different legislative calendars compared to Congress, I will break each one down individually. Also, at the state level, you will see an even greater importance on the legislative calendar, as state legislatures have requirements and deadlines within the calendar that will provide your insight on how to plan your legislative advocacy. At the federal level, the calendar will affect your advocacy, but there are fewer calendar-related constraints to legislative work.

### 33.1.1 Florida

Ok, first, you must know the basics of the state calendar. Florida's constitution Art. III, § 3. Sessions of the legislature.- Identifies all paths for the state legislature to be in session. Every two years, there are three required sessions (in order): organizational, odd year, and even year. The organizational session serves little legislative purpose, as the name implies, it is for organizational purposes.. It happens 14 days after even-year general elections. So in 2024, the general election was on November 5, 2024, so the organizational session occurred on November 19, 2024. This can be looked at going forward as well. Florida used to have the exact timeline for the odd-year session and the even-year session until 2018, where unlike other states, Florida has a Constitution Revision Commission that makes suggested amendments to the state's constitution, the commission only meets every 20 years, and the next one is scheduled for 2037, so I will not go into detail on the commission. But the commission proposed a change to the state legislature session timeline during their 2017 meeting; they proposed an amendment, which passed in 2018, that changed the even-numbered years' legislative session dates. After the constitution change, the Florida legislature is in session during the following periods in odd-numbered years: the legislative session will convene the first Tuesday after the first Monday in March, and in even-numbered years, the legislative session will convene the second Tuesday after the first Monday in January. Florida has a sixty-day legislative session; there are extensions and early Sine Dies that could make the legislative session run longer or shorter, but it is set for sixty days. In addition to the session, the Florida legislature has a process called committee weeks, which allows it to begin to work before the official start of the legislative session. Outside of the potential of an extension or special election, you can easily outline long-term planning, as you can use the constitution for the calendar and the rules for each and joint chamber requirements, which are mainly based on the calendar. Below I've included the constitutionally required sessions for the subsequent 11 sessions, this period will take you from a freshman in the legislature completing their first term (2026 session) to their replacement (2032 Organizational Session).

| | |
|---|---|
| 2026 Convene: January 13, 2026 | 2026 Sine Die: March 13, 2026 |
| 2026 Organizational Session: | November 17, 2026 |
| 2027 Convene: March 2, 2027 | 2027 Sine Die: April 30, 2027 |
| 2028 Convene: January 11, 2028 | 2028 Sine Die: March 10, 2028 |
| 2028 Organizational Session: | November 21, 2028 |
| 2029 Convene: March 6, 2029 | 2029 Sine Die: May 4, 2029 |
| 2030 Convene: January 15, 2030 | 2030 Sine Die: March 15, 2030 |
| 2030 Organizational Session: | November 19, 2030 |
| 2031 Convene: March 4, 2031 | 2031 Sine Die: May 2, 2031 |
| 2032 Convene: January 13, 2032 | 2032 Sine Die: March 12, 2032 |
| 2032 Organizational Session: | November 16, 2032 |

### 33.1.2 Texas

The Texas Legislature meets once every two years, and it meets during odd years for 140 days. During the rest of the two-year session, they will only meet due to a special election being called. Here are the legislative sessions until the 2032 election.

| | |
|---|---|
| 2025 Convene: January 14, 2025 | 2025 Sine Die: June 2, 2025 |
| 2027 Convene: January 12, 2027 | 2027 Sine Die: May 31, 2027 |
| 2029 Convene: January 9, 2029 | 2029 Sine Die: May 28, 2029 |
| 2031 Convene: January 14, 2031 | 2031 Sine Die: June 2, 2031 |

### 33.1.3 Congress

Members of Congress are sworn in at the same time on the same day every odd year, January 3rd at noon. The Congress continues until January 3rd during the next odd-numbered year at 11:59 am. The calendar you will need to review is when the chambers of Congress are in session and when they are out of session. With both the U.S. House and Senate, the calendars may change during the year, sometimes to add days of session and other times they remove them.

The Congressional calendar is drastically different from the state legislative calendar. Let's look at how the states utilize the two years between even-year general elections.

Florida: Three sessions – Organizing session shortly after the election (for example, November 2026), odd year session starting in March of the following year (for example, March 2027), and even year session beginning in January of the following year (for example, January 2028).

Texas: One session – 140-day session starting in January after the election.

Congress is full-time, so the Congressional calendar is year-round for two straight years. It starts and ends at noon on January 3rd.

So, with Congress being two years long, the legislative calendar has to have breaks in it that are predictable in some parts, but in others require an understanding of what you are looking for and how to plan advocacy around it.

After the general election, the party that will likely lead the chamber in the next Congress will put out the upcoming year's Congressional calendar. The calendar will typically become available in late November or early December (for example, 2026). In the following year (for example, 2027), the party controlling Congress will release the calendar for the following year (for example, 2028) in November or December.

Still, even after the calendar is released, there will be changes to the dates that Congress is in and out of session. You can start understanding the flow of Congress by knowing that the individuals who are designing the calendar have a primary responsibility of protecting their party's control of the chamber by winning elections and passing their party's objectives, be it messaging or action. So, while you can quickly see the calendar and write down what days members are set to be in session, there are a few more steps in understanding the flow of Congress.

## 2025 Congressional Calendar

Below is the one-page House calendar as available on June 11, 2025. This calendar provides an insightful fact: the one-page calendar is not updated as quickly as other resources, and this was the case for both the calendar shared by Republicans and Democrats. For example, the House canceled votes on June 13, 2025, on June 4th, yet two days before the 13th, the House's calendar still shows them in session, when they will not be here. So while the one-page calendars make life easier, you should still become familiar with the other available calendars.



## August (August Recess)

August recess can land you a meeting with legislative staff, but you have to be flexible on the day. As you look at the 2025 legislative calendar, you can quickly realize that throughout 2025, there are only three periods in which the members of Congress will be outside of Washington, D.C. for two or more weeks straight. There were two weeks in April, August recess, and the Christmas holidays. So, these are the only times this year when D.C. staffers, which typically includes the legislative staff, can go on a long trip. So, when you are attempting to get meetings during August recess, you have to understand that you may accomplish all your goal meetings, but it may run several weeks, as staffers will find a way out of town. An action campaign can reasonably schedule meetings between constituents and member staff during August via Zoom, or if you are permanently in Washington, D.C., but you should not plan to fly into D.C. during August, as your meetings may be over the course of three weeks between vacations and telework days. The likelihood of meeting diminishes during even years, as staff may also be helping with the campaign (their boss or others).

## Summer Extended Weekends

It is common for Congress to take off an additional Thursday or Friday in the summer. You have to recognize that members of Congress are humans, so they want to go home. If you are giving them a choice between a day in the swamp or at home/on a yacht, they are going to make the same choice you would make.

Knowing that Congress may add days off in the summer, I strongly advise against planning member meetings, briefings, or planned advocacy on the 3rd or 4th day of a four-day DC work week. So, in a Monday to Thursday week, you should not plan for Wednesday or Thursday. And in a Tuesday to Friday week, you should not plan for Thursday or Friday. And with a five-day work week, you should not plan for Thursday or Friday.

## Winter Break 2025

Every year, staffers want to go home. You have to remember, most of these D.C. member office staffers came to Washington, D.C., and are not from D.C. So, after December 19, 2025, unless there is a must-pass bill between the 19th and January 5th, you should assume that the staffer you are attempting to reach is unavailable. The general unavailability of staff is because staff will take extended vacation during this extended break and the federal holidays.

## October 2026 (Campaign Recess)

While the 2026 calendar is not out yet, there is an overwhelming likelihood that there will be no legislative activity scheduled for October 2026. Members of Congress have to win elections to stay members of Congress, so they do what is best for them by creating a second recess period during even years in October. You are not getting any substantial meetings during this period. During this recess

period, staffers like their members are actively engaged in campaigns. As staffers can lose or gain a lot on election night, their focus will primarily be on elections in October 2026.

The other issue is that after the 4th of July 2026, nothing real will get done until January 2027. During that time, we will see America 250 celebrations, then members will go into August recess, back for a few weeks in September, and then back in recess come October. And after all that electioneering, the election, and then a lame duck session.

## November and December 2026 (Lame Duck Session)

After election day, the focus of the larger body will be on the 120th Congress, with leadership battles and the likelihood of Democrats regaining the majority. Still, this time could be used to push through the last of President Trump's agenda. These two months will be the final days of the implementation of the Trump agenda, as Democratic control of the House of Representatives in the 120th Congress would force a more collaborative path to policy, or what was seen in the 118th Congress, a complete lack of action. There are also joyous times during this period, including new member orientation and the room selection lottery. And sad times with the departing member offices being downsized into a single desk in the Rayburn café.

## Lame Duck Winter break

There is absolutely nothing you can be doing or need to bring up during this winter break related to the 119th Congress. All votes will be over until the 120th Congress. So you should be focused on hitting the ground running in the 120th Congress, and at this point, all 119th Congress actions should have ended.

## Must pass bills

Each year, Congress passes "Must Pass" bills. With these must-pass bills, members look to place pieces of policy into these bills, as they may be the only way to pass a bill or a piece of the bill into law. So, while you track policy, you must also pay attention to policy riders that are being thrown at these bills.

## Germaneness

While the House of Representatives has germaneness rules limiting what members of the lower chambers can suggest as amendments, the Senate does not have the same germaneness rules, resulting in bills that must pass the Senate with policy concepts that would be ruled non-germane if the same amendment were offered in the House of Representatives.

## Congressional Calendar Links

**When is the House in session**

**2025**
https://www.majorityleader.gov/house-legislative-calendar-2025/

**When the Senate is in Session**

**2025**
https://www.senate.gov/legislative/2025_schedule.htm

## 33.2 Understand the Schedule?

This is a separate section from checking the calendar, as knowing if your legislature or Congress is in session or not is one part of the journey. But in addition to knowing the schedule, you have to understand the schedule.

In most states, legislatures are part-time, so members have other responsibilities that they have to take care of and live outside of the state capital. During legislative sessions, members go home: they have families, they have constituents, and they have jobs. So you have to look at when the member will likely be at the Capitol. If there is no floor activity until Wednesday and the member has no committee meetings until Tuesday, the likelihood of them being in town on Monday is low. This also goes for the other end of the week. If floor activity ends on a Thursday, and the member does not have any hearings going after noon on Friday, the likelihood of them wanting a Friday afternoon meeting is low. Knowing this, you can plan your state-level advocacy based on when members will be in the Capitol, if you are working on Capitol advocacy. You can also use this understanding of the days in which members are in session and the ability to identify upcoming committee weeks to identify when members should be home. Knowing when they are home helps with advocacy, just as does knowing when they are at the Capitol. Some advocacy actions are best suited for in-district, so this will help you organize and schedule out those activities while the individual is set to be in their district.

In Congress, members have a fairly structured schedule from arriving in D.C. until heading back to their district. The U.S. House has a standard vote every fly-in day, the first day of a legislative week, that happens at 6:30 p.m. And the fly-out day, the last day of the legislative week, has a hard stop on the last vote of the day at 3:00 p.m. With the fly-out day, the real stop is closer to 11:00 a.m., but it can go until 3:00 p.m. Now that you know when members fly in and when they fly out, you have to look at what that means for your advocacy. If you want to meet with the member, you have to identify what days are realistic for the meeting. The first day and last are gone, so that leaves your Monday through Thursday week, with the best meeting time availability on Tuesday and Wednesday. So, you can now plan your travel around when is the best time to have the D.C. meeting with the member. That is also when you want to host any event that is aiming to get members to come out in Washington, D.C. There are very few reasons why they would make a separate trip to D.C. to participate in an event. But you can also look at the reverse and identify the best time to meet with their DC staff or plan district action. As the staff's priority is the member, they will attempt to make time for you, but they will not prioritize you over their member. So, you can look at requesting staff meetings after the fly-out or during district work periods, as the staff will be more able to meet.

## 33.3 Getting around D.C. and the Capitol

When you are visiting your state capitol or the national capitol, you should familiarize yourself with the layout of the buildings and the locations of the committee rooms.

In the United States House of Representatives, there are multiple House buildings that an advocate would never visit, like the Ford and O'Neil buildings. Still, they serve a purpose to House employees, as many of the committee staffers work in these buildings, and some other staff support services are located between the two buildings.

### Metro Accessible

You can easily get to the Capitol via bus or train, and the House buildings are even easier to get to by bus as the WMATA bus route runs directly down Independence Avenue, stopping at multiple locations in front of the buildings. If you want to take the bus you get on the D10 and if you're going to use the Metro, which most will choose to do, you can get on or transfer on to the Blue, Orange, or Silver Line and get off at the Capitol South exit, you can also use the Federal Center Southwest stop, this stop requires a more advanced knowledge of the capitol complex but it is helpful if you are leaving Rayburn as it is down the hill.

## Which Airport?

If you are flying in for just a day and want to maximize your visit, you have to think about which of the three airports to fly into, and there is only one answer: Reagan National Airport (DCA). DCA is less than five miles from the Capitol, and you can get back to the Capitol in less than 20 minutes. BWI and IAD may save you $50-100 on your flight, but you will be 30 miles away from the Capitol, at least one hour away when in traffic, and could easily leave with a $150 Uber bill for that round trip.

If you are in D.C. for more than a day, you can use the other airports, but I still suggest DCA. With all three, you have public transportation options that will get you to the Capitol. You can take the Blue or Yellow line from DCA into the city, or the Silver line from IAD into the town. If you are coming from BWI, you have two options: Amtrak & MARC, which will both take you to Union Station.

## The Capitol Building

But for the most part, when you talk about Congress, you are talking about the Capitol building. With the House buildings being on the Southern side of the larger Capitol complex, the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives is on the Southern side of the Capitol building, on the 2nd floor. Visitors can get gallery passes for when Congress is in session, and if Congress is out of session, you can get a tour of the House Floor if your member of Congress's office has the capacity to provide one and has the ability based on pro-forma sessions and daily floor visit limits.

When you are visiting the House buildings, you have to remember three key buildings and how to get around them.

## The House Buildings – Cannon, Longworth, and Rayburn

You will get lost in the House buildings, everyone does, members of Congress and their staff. So instead of being permanently lost, you need to plan your visit with an understanding of the complex. When in the House, you are likely visiting member offices in Cannon, Longworth, and Rayburn.

First, let's break down room numbers. You have to view the house buildings as all having a four-digit room number, knowing that Cannon's offices have three-digit numbers. So the first number is the building number, with the Cannon building, see it as an imaginary zero at the front. So if you see Room 390 in the House, you are being sent to Cannon as this could be viewed as 0390. Next, let's look at the second digit, 3, which tells you which floor the room is on. So now you are done with your meetings in Cannon, you will be able to walk through the underground tunnels to Longworth. In Longworth, we are now going to get the Ways & Means Committee room in 1100. So you know that it is a Longworth office, as the first number is one. And with the second number being one, you know that you are going to the first floor of Longworth. Now that you are leaving Longworth for Rayburn, you can go down either set of escalators from Rayburn to Longworth if you want to stay inside. Now you are

looking for the Education & Workforce hearing room to hear Dr. Rich Lyons, Chancellor, University of California, Berkeley, act as a witness for the July 9, 2025, hearing, you will have to go to 2175. So after navigating the first two buildings, you are now more than capable of getting around, you see 2175 and automatically separate the room number to 2-Rayburn 1-First floor 75-room number.

## Food and Services

The Capitol complex is built so staffers will never have to leave campus. The restaurants change names (and will change in September 2025), but the locations stay the same. In addition to the food options, there are services throughout the building to ensure that staffers are able to stay on campus.

In Cannon, you have Au Bon Pain in Cannon 192, you have the Common Grounds Coffee Stand, and the Sweetgreen Outpost in the Basement Rotunda. You can also get your shoes polished in the rotunda.

In Longworth, you have the most options, but these are also the most utilized options. In Longworth, if you are hungry, you go to the basement floor. On the basement floor, you have Longworth Cafeteria, the Convenience Store, Dunkin' Donuts, which has a Baskin-Robbins in it, Jamba Juice, and pop-up food providers in the cafeteria. In Longworth, you can go to the credit union, post office, gift shop, or dry cleaners, as they are all public; you will not be able to go to the office supply store, as that is staff & members only.

In Rayburn, if you are hungry, you go to the Ground level. On the ground floor, you have a Subway in the center of the East hallway, and next to it is the Barber Shop and Hair Salon. On the West hallway, going from south to north, you have the Rayburn Cafeteria with soup and salad options (same entrance as Steak & Shake), Steak & Shake, pop-up food vendors, sushi preparation, and then the dining hall. Across the dining hall, you have the last food option, Common Grounds Café.

If you have time to leave the House buildings, there is food in the Visitor Center and down Independence Avenue. Still, with the goal of advocacy, it is vital that you are able to get food near your meetings and that you use the knowledge of where members' offices are located and food options in the building to maximize your time in the building.

## 33.4 Florida Legislature

In the last few years, there have been two significant changes in the law regarding Academic Freedom in Florida: SB 7044 (2022) and SB 266 (2023). SB 7044 added the authorization of post-tenure review to the state of Florida, and it triggered a path to accreditation changes across the state's colleges and universities. SB 266 (HB 999) changed the authorization of post-tenure review to a requirement of post-tenure review. It stopped funding for programs deemed "DEI" by the state and triggered a review and potential revisions of core courses across the state. In addition to the laws, Florida's academic freedom was altered by the "hostile takeover" of New College of Florida and the "Spoils" System created by SB 7044. During this past legislative session, HB 1321 / SB 1726 were making their path through the state system, including efforts to check the powers created by SB 7044, but they did not pass into law.

### SB 7044 – Focus on Accreditation

SB 7044 has forced each of the state's colleges and universities to begin an accreditation switch. This switch was triggered by a fight between Governor DeSantis and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACS or SACSCOC) after the takeover at New College. This accreditation switch will require all of the state's schools to leave SACSCOC, with many already showing a preference for going to the Higher Learning Commission (HLC).

### SB 7044 – State College & University Presidents Gubernatorial Takeover

The path to becoming a university or college president in Florida has become whether Governor DeSantis wants you or not. With changes based on the 2022 bill, Governor DeSantis and the Board of Governors gained power in the selection of school presidents. As Ana Ceballos discussed in her articles for the Miami Herald, the Florida House is moving forward with an effort to limit the Governor's power in the selection process. State legislators have seen that the process has deteriorated in front of them, and the system has broken down so severely that even Republican leadership is fighting against it. As shared by Jim Saunders for the News Service of Florida, Speaker Daniel Perez went in front of the Board of Governors and compared the current search process to a "spoils system". In his article, he detailed the power that Governor DeSantis has recently wielded over the state's higher education network. In recent years the article highlights, that system has resulted in "former state House Majority Leader Adam Hasner became president of Florida Atlantic University; former House Speaker Richard Corcoran became president of New College of Florida; former Rep. Mel Ponder became president of Northwest Florida State College; former Rep. Tommy Gregory became president of State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota; and former Rep. Fred Hawkins became president of South Florida State College." And in the weeks since I originally drafted this section, Lieutenant Governor Jeannette Nuñez became president at Florida International University, and Republican lobbyist Marva Johnson became the President at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University. These are in addition to other DeSantis loyalists who have been confirmed in leadership roles throughout the higher education network.

## SB 7044 – "Hostile Takeover" of New College of Florida

Governor DeSantis has used his powers to place former House Speaker Richard Corcoran at New College. In this role, Corcoran has dismantled New College's historic image as a tiny, liberal university. As written about in an AP article from March 30, 2023. They chronicled the rapid pace at which New College of Florida went from the state's progressive school to what DeSantis wanted. In less than one month, DeSantis replaced enough university trustees to oust New College President Patricia Okker and replace her with Corcoran. New College's faculty and students saw these efforts as a "hostile takeover," limiting their academic freedom.

## SB 266 – FAMU

In October 2024, a FAMU spokesperson reported to Inside Higher Education that the school was "not adversely affected by the general course changes." But the January 2025 list of course updates presented to the Florida Board of Governors brings doubt to what "adversely affected" means to the school. The doubt originates as the list of courses that have been reviewed and "updated" due SB 266 include: Introduction to African American Studies, The African American Experience, U.S. History 1496-1865, U.S. History 1865 to Present, Introduction to African American History, African Americans in Film, African Humanities, Jazz History, Afro-American Music, Black Religion in America, Caribbean Literature and Popular Culture, African-Caribbean Literature and History of Civilization since 1500. Where the question of the nature of changes made to the courses increases when you view FAMU's Board of Trustees' Academic and Student Affairs Committee Meeting documents where you can see that many of the courses revised as of January 2025, went through the original course review where their statuses were "Reviewed: No Updates" then to be later changed to "Reviewed: Updated" in the revised course review status. These new changes include references to aligning with Florida Statutes 1007.25 and 1007.55 (the statutes were changed by SB 266) and the inclusion of Western Cannon reference. And other courses, like Contemporary Black Social Philosophy, are being altered in both the original and revised course review, and classes like Introduction to Sociology and Special Topics in the Humanities are being removed from General Education.

## SB 266 – FSU Seminoles

This August, football will be back at Doak Campbell Stadium. The tailgates will start the season with hope and the promise of the future of the team. You finish up your tailgate and walk down Langford Green. The first home game of the season is about to start, and you must take your annual picture on Williams Plaza. You yell for your classmate to walk over, and you chop in your picture in front of the "Unconquered Statute". You rush to your seats and, as you must, watch "him" throw down the spear. Sadly, with recent changes to Florida State University and the State University System, you have a greater ability to learn about Chief Osceola, Renegade, Seminole Nation, and why the statute says Unconquered at game day rather than in the classroom. As Josh Moody outlined in his article in Inside Higher Education, Florida State University removed "American History 583: The Seminoles and the

Southeastern Indians" from the classes that count towards general education credits. So, you can run around in clothing that says Seminole, know that Chief Osceola is on the statue, and be depicted on the field riding Renegade. Still, if you want to know about the history of Seminoles, the nation called the Timucua, or the Muscogee Creek Indians, you cannot do it as a core class, as this class was removed from the core classes during the January 2025 purge. So, as you drive down Miccosukee Road or Apalachee Parkway on your way to the game, you may pass Indianhead and drive down a nene or two; know that the very history of that region and the namesake of the team is not considered acceptable to be a core course.

## SB 266 – Lift Every Voice and Sing

With this ongoing purge of painful history, there is the question of whether Florida will move to ban "Lift Every Voice and Sing." With the application of SB 266, the lyrics of this song may be deemed non-compliant and incendiary, and the song itself may be seen as not a part of the Western canon. While this song has been considered the national anthem by the NAACP since 1919, Florida's laws could lead to its exclusion from classes like FAMU's Afro-American Music.

## Issues in Florida – No path for dilatory actions

In recent years, the Republican leadership in the Florida House of Representatives has begun utilizing House Rule 11.13 – Dilatory Motions to stop House Democrats from using amendments in a dilatory fashion. In Florida, there is currently no path for a Democratic-only filibuster in either chamber, with Republicans having supermajorities in both chambers. In addition to standard tactics, Republicans in Florida can speed up bills when they choose with their supermajority by eliminating the requirement for bills to be read on three separate days (as outlined in Florida's Constitution).

## Issues in Florida – Lack of continued advocacy

In discussions at the state legislature, I was told that there has been a void in advocacy regarding academic freedom since the passage of SB 266. Sadly, that was a repeated position of legislators, staffers, and lobbyists at the state. With the heightened discussion on academic freedom at the national level, the debate around academic freedom should naturally increase. Still, as a goal of seeing improved advocacy efforts, I plan to provide additional advocacy training to help support academic freedom on college campuses.

## Going forward in Florida – HB 1321 / SB 1726: Ending the "Spoils" System

This spoiled system has propelled forward the Florida House Bill 1321 and Senate Bill 1726. While these bills did not pass in the 2025 session, they may see an easier path in the 2026 session with Governor DeSantis already on his way out, as HB 1321 has already passed the House in bipartisan fashion with a vote of 104-8. Before these bills failed to pass, Governor DeSantis, in an attempt to maintain his control

of the state colleges and universities, went on an attack against HB 1321. In this attack, he attempted to go directly after one of the bill's cosponsors, State Representative Anna Eskamani, by calling her "the most flamboyantly left-wing Democrat in the entire Florida House of Representatives." While that might be an attack if you are a Republican, Representative Eskamani, a proud Democrat, has proudly shared the attack on her social media. The governor continued to outline his objective with his control of the presidential selection process, limiting academic freedom. In his attack on Representative Eskamani, the Governor objected because Rep. Eskamani would not "further our mission to make sure we don't allow our universities to be leftist bastions of indoctrination." The Governor's control of the school presidents has allowed him to impose a heavier hand on academic freedom.

## 33.5 Texas Legislature

In Texas, we have seen an interesting recent trend with academic freedom and free speech on college campuses. During President Trump's first term, there was a larger discussion of right-wing speech on college campuses, which triggered Texas to pass 2019's SB 18. While this period was seen as hostile to right-wing speech, it is worth noting that University of California Berkeley's Chancellor Nicholas Dirks penned a statement regarding a then planned speech on the campus by Milo Yiannopoulos in which Chancellor Dirks wrote "The concerns around the upcoming visit of a controversial speaker to campus make it necessary for us to reaffirm our collective commitment to two fundamental principles for our campus. The first of these principles is the right to free expression, enshrined in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and reflected in some of the most important moments of Berkeley's history. The second of these principles has to do with our values of tolerance, inclusion, and diversity – values which we believe are essential to making this university, and indeed any university, a site of open inquiry and learning."

As Anwar Glover said, "The thing about the old days, they the old days". In Texas, Mr. Glover's words could be seen as prophetic with the recent attack on free speech and academic freedom on college campuses. We have seen 2023's SB 17 and SB 18, where we saw the state attack DEI efforts on campuses and professor tenure. These efforts are similar to what we have seen in Florida. I've included a focus on 2019's SB 18 and 2025's SB 37/4499 as they show the reality that yesterday's position is not today's position, and today's position is not guaranteed to be tomorrow's position.

### 2019 SB 18 – FIRE & Richard Spencer

"Some colleges are banning free speech on college campuses, well no more because I am about to sign a law protecting free speech on college campuses" said Governor Abbot before signing 2019's SB 18 into law and after he signed it he said "shouldn't have to do it, the first amendment guarantees it, but now it is law in Texas". SB 18 was a byproduct of protests and cancellations of right-wing speakers on college campuses. In 2016, Richard Spencer came to Texas A&M and held a rally on campus. He had

some supporters in the crowd, but it was mainly people who were there in objection. Gabrielle Keene reported for Houston Public Media that in 2017, there was another attempt to invite Spencer to Texas A&M for "Today Charlottesville, Tomorrow Texas A&M", which the school canceled for safety concerns. The reality is free speech is free speech, so it is not shocking that Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression was supportive of SB 18, when they released the following statement: "FIRE is pleased to see the Lone Star State take a positive step to protect free speech".

## Issues in Texas – Dilatory actions: From Wendy Davis to non-existent

Texas had a long history of a fairly standard path to end a filibuster by requiring a super majority to end debate. There are other common paths, but so was their path. It is common for an upper chamber to have a two-thirds threshold, as it forces them to be more deliberative than the lower chamber, as it enshrines fellowship and the willingness to compromise between Senators from the two major parties. Texas's tradition lasted over sixty years, but with Senator Wendy Davis's historic filibuster efforts against SB 5, Republicans went back to the drawing board. They needed to change the rules to ensure they had more control of the state senate, so they changed the state's rule from a two-thirds majority to only requiring a three-fifths majority. But then, they needed to change it again to retain control of the Senate, so it was weakened again from a three-fifths majority to the current five-ninths majority requirement. So, while Texas had a long history of a two-thirds threshold to end a filibuster, it changed twice in a decade. It would not be shocking if the state Senate moved to a simple majority if needed to stop dilatory tactics.

## Going forward in Texas – The threat of SB 37 & HB 4499

With Florida's efforts to limit academic freedom with SB 266, we are seeing other states joining their efforts to force changes to the university's curriculum. We are watching Texas attempt to replicate the effort with SB 37/HB 4499. In Texas, the bill would disallow core courses that "endorse specific public policy, ideologies, or legislation." This is almost a duplicate of Florida's efforts with SB 266. With the Texas language being extremely vague, it would permit the state to identify practically any course that state leadership does not care for as one that either endorses as particular public policy or ideology, thus forcing the school to either make changes to the curriculum of the course to ensure that it remains a core class, removal of the class, or moving it from being a core class to becoming an elective. Within the bill are additional consolidations of power, with new controls on key university hires. In the bill, there is one ironic portion, as this bill would work to dismantle diverse teaching at the colleges and universities in Texas, the bill would call for something close to DEI for conservatives at the university level, after the state banned actual DEI with SB 18. What this conservative DEI effort is ensuring is that no core course in Texas will teach anything close to the DEI efforts they are utilizing to disrupt academic freedom. The bill would likely force Prairie View A&M University and the state's other minority serving institutions to make similar changes to what FAMU and FIU had to make as a result of SB 266. And as it did in Florida, this concept passed out of the Texas legislature and will become the law of Texas.

## 33.6 Trump 1.0

"My Administration seeks to promote free and open debate on college and university campuses. Free inquiry is an essential feature of our Nation's democracy, and it promotes learning, scientific discovery, and economic prosperity." – President Trump Executive Order 13864 (2019)

During President Trump's first term, you see the issuance of the regulation that ended the regional requirement of the accrediting agencies, permitting the later attacks by Governor DeSantis. You also see the issuance of Executive Order 13864, which focuses on the free speech of the alt-right, and threats from the President regarding free speech.

### No Milo = No Money

In early February 2017, President Trump let his outrage be known after UC Berkeley canceled Milo Yiannopoulos hours before it was supposed to begin. On Twitter (now X), President Trump tweeted, "If U.C. Berkeley does not allow free speech and practices violence on innocent people with a different point of view - NO FEDERAL FUNDS?" Chancellor Dirks wrote a letter regarding that planned event, recognizing the school's commitment to both the right to free expression and the values of tolerance, inclusion, and diversity, ensuring that all students could hear from even controversial speakers.

### Executive Order 13864 by President Donald Trump – Improving Free Inquiry on Campus

Like many other Republicans in the country during this time, President Trump was attacking colleges and universities that were not welcoming to alt-right speakers after incidents. This furor eventually led to Executive Order 13864 – Improving Free Inquiry, Transparency, and Accountability at Colleges and Universities. This executive order included the following policies from President Trump "It is the policy of the Federal Government to: (a) encourage institutions to foster environments that promote open, intellectually engaging, and diverse debate, including through compliance with the First Amendment for public institutions and compliance with stated institutional policies regarding freedom of speech for private institutions:" and this policy " Improving Free Inquiry on Campus. (a) To advance the policy described in subsection 2(a) of this order, the heads of covered agencies shall, in coordination with the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, take appropriate steps, in a manner consistent with applicable law, including the First Amendment, to ensure institutions that receive Federal research or education grants promote free inquiry, including through compliance with all applicable Federal laws, regulations, and policies."

## Federal Register 84 FR 58834 – End to Geographic Accreditation Regions

As discussed before, Florida has begun moving forward to switch their accrediting agency from SACSCOC, but I did not talk about what permitted that change. That was a regulation submitted by Secretary Betsy DeVos through the Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Education. This regulation, 84 FR 58834, started the attack: "These final regulations remove the 'geographic area of accrediting activities' from the definition of 'scope of recognition or scope." at 84 FR 58893.

## Republicans During the Biden Years

"For years, universities have stoked the flames of an ideology which goes by many names—anti-racism, anti-colonialism, critical race theory, DEI, intersectionality, the list goes on." – Chair Virginia Foxx, Committee on Education and the Workforce.

The most significant development on college campuses during the Biden administration was academic freedom adjacent, as more discussion focused on free speech. While the framework for many of the resulting hearings regarding how colleges and universities have responded to antisemitism on campus, the opening still provided a path for Chair Foxx to go after parts of academic freedom that she was not supportive of. In a hearing titled "Holding Campus Leader Accountable and Confronting Antisemitism," Chair Foxx released a series of objections to the teaching of things far from antisemitism. In her opening statement, she went after being "anti-racism, anti-colonialism, critical race theory, DEI, and intersectionality." She furthers her dislike for academic offerings at Harvard, seminars at Harvard Global Health Institute, and a webpage on Harvard Divinity School's website by citing them by name. The thread that ran through the items she named dropped; they had to deal with racism. These classes were not about antisemitism, as the hearing was supposed to focus on.

But this statement was not the focal point of this hearing, the focal point was the back-and-forth between Congresswoman Elise Stefanik and President Dr. Claudine Gay of Harvard University. Typically, a member would only be able to register a limited number of questions to a witness because of their time allotment being five minutes. But in this case, Congresswoman Stefanik was able to get Reps. McClain, Bean, Burlison, and Houchin to yield portions of their time allotments to her. Not only did this yielding of time allow Congresswoman Stefanik to ask more questions, but it also provided her with breaks between questions, permitting her time to rework questions geared to witnesses. During the time yielded over from Congresswoman Houchin, Ms. Stefanik volleyed her round of yes and no questions to the witnesses.

While that was not the first of the committee hearings in the wake of October 7th, it was the most memorable as it adversely impacted the President who testified at that hearing. The original culmination of politicians' interest in the topic appears to have been when Republican leadership held press conferences at Columbia University calling for the resignation of then University President Minouche Shafik.

While the time was ripe with the fight for academic freedom on college campuses, it was not a federal fight. With President Biden being in the White House, House Republicans in the 118th Congress understood that their actions would mainly be performative, as MAGA policy had no chance of being signed into law by President Biden. Additionally, with President Biden selecting Secretary Cardona, there were essentially zero federal paths to limit academic freedom at the Department of Education without President Biden's approval.

## 33.7 Trump 2.0

"The next Administration should also rescind Dear Colleague Letter (DCL) GEN 22-11 and DCL GEN 22-10 and its letters to accreditation agencies dated July 19, 2022, which are attempts to undercut Florida's SB 7044, providing universities more flexibility on accreditation." - Project 2025

With the start of the second Trump administration, there has been a direct targeting of universities' academic freedom and free speech. These attacks escalated with drastic freezes to federal funding to universities like Harvard, the use of immigration laws against international students, threats to Harvard's not-for-profit status, threats to Georgetown Law regarding federal hiring, and threats to accreditors.

As Trump 2.0 is barely five months old, when my fellowship ends, it is not realistic for me to document all that has happened and will happen.

## 33.8 Elections in Focus

In all three focuses, Florida, Texas, and the United States have Republicans in control of the House, Senate, and the executive branch.

### 33.8.1 Florida

In Florida, Democrats would need to win both the 2026 governor's race and would have to get back up to at least 41 members in the House or 14 in the Senate. As winning the governor's mansion alone would not give the Democrats enough power, with the Republicans holding a super majority in both the Florida House of Representatives and the Florida Senate. In Florida, the Democratic party has not controlled either chamber or the Governor's mansion since the 1990s. There is some hope for Florida Democrats. During President Trump's first mid-term election in 2018, Tallahassee Mayor Andrew Gillum's performance as the Democratic gubernatorial nominee in Florida resulted in him losing by only four-tenths of a percent, 32,463 votes. Mayor Gillum came the closest to winning since the last

Democratic Governor Lawton Chiles beat (not yet) Governor Jeb Bush in 1994. With the Republican nominee almost set as Congressman Byron Donalds, the intrigue is which Democrat will eventually become the nominee. Some potential candidates could grab attention, such as House Democratic Leader Fentrice Driskell, State Senator Shevrin Jones, Mayor Daniella Levine Cava, and former Congresswoman Gwen Graham. Some big names may run as independents, NPA, or have announced as Democratic candidates for the office. Still, the list above is some of the prime potential candidates, especially with former Assistant Secretary José Javier Rodríguez announcing his plan to run for state attorney general.

For Florida Democrats to have a path, they will have to win at least the Gubernatorial race in 2026. Taking back the Governor's mansion would give the Democrats an incumbent going into the 2030 Gubernatorial race, increasing the likelihood of a Democrat being the Governor going into the 2032 reapportionment process. This would also create a space to build more policy infrastructure in Florida, as it would provide high-paying government jobs to Democrats. Having a Democratic Governor in 2030 would also help the party push to reverse years of perceived gerrymandering, as Democrats would have some control over redistricting for the first time since 1992. There will be other cabinet-level elections, but those positions are not as crucial as the gubernatorial race for long-term policy addressing academic freedom in Florida. As with the different cabinet offices, if Republicans in Florida continue to control the House, Senate, and governor's mansion, we may see attempts to limit the powers of the other cabinet members. We saw Florida Republicans' attacks on Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services Commissioner Nikki Fried, during her term after she left the 2018 elections as Florida's only statewide Democrat.

### 33.8.2 Texas

In Texas, Democrats would have to win the Governor's mansion and maintain the current seats in the Texas House of Representatives and the Texas Senate. The path to the Governor's mansion in Texas is a much tougher concept, with the last Democrat to win the race being Governor Ann Richards in 1990. And unlike Florida, there have not been any close elections lately. Since Governor Richards' win in 1990, no Democratic nominee for Governor has come within 7 points of winning, with most losing by over ten points.

### 33.8.3 United States

There will be a special U.S. Senate race, as Senator Ashley Moody will have to defend the seat she was appointed to when Senator Marco Rubio became Secretary of State. A U.S. Senate race is important, but it just does not shift Florida or the federal short-term outcomes. The easy path to fight for academic freedom on college campuses at the federal level will be winning back the United States House of Representatives. It is plausible that before the end of the 119th Congress, we will see

Speaker Hakeem Jeffries, due to the already close margins. With the April 2025 special elections in Florida's 1st and 6th districts resulting in seats that Republicans had previously won by 30 points, seeing Republicans winning by 14 points in the special election is likely to put fear in many Republican incumbents and candidates. This is because 60 Republicans won their seats by less than the shift we have seen towards Democrats since the 2024 election. So, there is an overwhelming likelihood that Democrats will control the U.S. House of Representatives on January 3, 2027. If Democrats take back the House, the Trump administration's legislative agenda will end that day. And for most parts of the agenda, it will end long before that day, as at-risk members will have to balance loyalty to President Trump and their electoral safety. But the reality is, if President Trump's brand is toxic for House Republicans, you will see a streak of Republicans announcing they are not running for re-election in 2026. The question is, why would a septuagenarian multimillionaire congressmember punish themselves for a year, only to lose their seat in Congress? Many choose to leave, and announcements will start to pick up after the August recess in 2025.

## 33.9 Just because you are right, does not mean you are right

On election day, the Streets, or in the Capitol, being right does not always mean you are right. Being right, smarter, more educated, more well-read, and countless other things that make you right… It does not matter.

It does not matter, as you are not getting a second vote on election day.
It does not matter, as you are the one hoping to persuade the court of public opinion.
It does not matter, as you are the one trying to influence the elected official or staffer.

Unless you are right, it increases the likelihood of winning the election, persuading the public, or teaming up with the Capitol, then you are wrong. This is a hard thing for smart people to get, because they want to be able to explain why they are right. But in these spaces, it does not matter.

## 33.10 Compromise is a BFD

One of the more documented versions of a large, compromised bill is the Affordable Care Act. The Affordable Care Act, which was first called Obamacare as a slur by Republicans, later began to be called Obamacare proudly by Democrats, was not designed to be perfect, but to become law. This is one of the most documented cases of the art of the deal and how compromise resulted in something far better than what they would have gotten otherwise. Few Democrats today would say the Affordable Care Act was a failure. In an article from the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, Jennifer Sullivan, Allison Orris, and Gideon Lukens reported on the beginning of the second decade of the Affordable Care Act. In the report, they discussed how the ACA helped lower the number of uninsured Americans

by 20 million, dropping the uninsured rate by roughly half. Senator Chris Murphy (D-Connecticut) shared the magnitude of the time spent on the path to the passage of the ACA in a 2014 statement. This legislation resulted in the House of Representatives spending 100 hours in hearings and the Senate spending 25 consecutive days in session on health reform, resulting in over 160 hours spent considering Obamacare. And hundreds of amendments were passed between the chambers, and eventually, we have a bill on the President's desk. In a 2013 report, CBS News reported that "since 2011, the House of Representatives has spent approximately $53.8 million attempting to repeal health care reform." So, the Tea Party spent nearly $54 million over 2+ years to continuously fail at "repealing Obamacare". Then Vice President Joe Biden called it a "Big Fucking Deal" for a reason, it was masterful compromise to achieve a larger goal. Democrats were pummeled in the 2010 mid-term election during the rise of the Tea Party, but Obamacare is still the law of the land.

But as the Affordable Care Act was building up momentum to become law, you threw in the wrench known as the public option. Now, everyone is mad at President Obama; he wants the public option, but understands that something is better than nothing. The President understood that you cannot force absolutes during the path to a compromised success. Craig Gordon highlighted that Senatorial Candidate Obama proclaimed himself as a "proponent of a single-payer, universal health care plan". So, how could he allow the public option to go away? It was the only path to passage. With Senator Lieberman's filibuster threat, a deal had to be made. So, some may feel as if they held their noses and closed their eyes when they voted, but they voted for it.

It is the understanding that there are many times when the decision to compromise ends up as a positive, as it gets you closer to your goal when other actions would not land you there. President Obama accepted that his perfect bill would not happen, but he got across the finish line with the best bill he saw possible.

In the case of the state Senators, Senator Garcia has received criticism from the Democratic party for years for various things, including the controversy around her 2020 election. But on this vote, she joined the Democrats, resulting in a short-term deal that stopped a push to permit guns on the campuses of the Florida State University System.

Only authoritarian and dictators can choose absolutes; everyone else has to compromise.

So, as you work to change policy, you must accept that you will not get perfection. Even a President who dared to wear a tan suit had to compromise. Sometimes in bad positions, the best you will get is a prick, but it is better than a stab. While a prick is not enjoyable, until you are able to stop the blade, it is the better of the options. And sometimes you have to be willing to partner with individuals you would normally oppose; you can simultaneously dislike an ally and build allyship to achieve a mutually beneficial solution.