



**THE ULTIMATE  
GUIDE TO  
UNDERSTANDING  
CAPITOL HILL  
FOR ACTIVISM**

**HERITAGE  
ACTION  
FOR AMERICA**

## FELLOW CONSERVATIVE,

Grassroot activists play an integral role in advancing the conservative movement. Your elected officials were sent to Washington to represent you, but too often conservatives find that campaign rhetoric translates to empty promises once lawmakers are in the position to cast votes.

Americans are frustrated — and with good reason. Lawmakers are called to lead, not to get caught up in political games. With such pressing issues facing our nation we don't need show votes that amount to nothing more than political theater.

Conservatives are taking a stand and holding Congress accountable. Activists remind members who they work for and are ready with the facts when a lawmaker tries to spin their vote.

Every day, dedicated citizens like yourself are working to ensure our lawmakers are making sound policy decisions on Capitol Hill. By downloading this activism guide, you have made a strategic and important choice in expanding your knowledge in order to effectively impact Congress.

We hope you utilize Heritage Action's expertise and resources to work with us and hold lawmakers accountable.

Thank you for your commitment to conservative values.

Sincerely,



Mike Needham  
CEO, Heritage Action for America



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# HOW CONGRESS ACTUALLY WORKS AND WHY ACTIVISM MATTERS

## THE BASICS

In order to impact Congress, you first need to understand how it works. Let's start with the basics — understanding the legislative process is key to becoming an effective political activist.



### HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

There are 435 voting members. Each state receives representation proportional to its population, but each is entitled to at least one representative and they are elected to serve two-year terms.



### SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

The **Speaker of the House** serves as leader of the House, carrying out both institutional and administrative roles.



### SENATE

Made up of 100 elected officials, each state is ensured equal representation from two senators who serve six-year terms.



### LEADERSHIP

The **Majority Leader** (party with majority of seats) and **Minority Leader** serve as the chief spokespersons on the floor. **Whips**, who are also elected in party conferences, are tasked with garnering votes within their parties on major issues, and if the party floor leader is absent the whip often steps up.

**Leadership is responsible for getting legislation passed.**

## SPONSORS

Each bill first needs a sponsor in order to be introduced. Bills can have co-sponsors, meaning a member signs on to show support for the measure. Then it is assigned to committee.

## ON THE FLOOR

Once a bill has been approved in committee, the legislation becomes eligible for debate on the floor. Here, it can be passed, defeated or amended. When a bill will be scheduled for floor debate is up to leadership, and often happens on short notice.

## AMENDMENTS

An amendment is an official change to legislation, used to add, remove or update language.

## VOTES NEEDED IN THE HOUSE TO PASS

A simple majority (218 of 435) is needed to move the bill to the Senate.

## VOTES NEEDED IN THE SENATE TO PASS

It takes a majority of the senators voting. If everyone is present, it takes 51 votes, or 50 votes if the vice president votes to break the tie. There are many important procedural votes along the way, such as cloture that requires 60 votes.

## COMMITTEES

Committees are crucial to the legislative process. As it's frequently said, a bill lives or dies in committee. Thousands of bills are referred to committees each year and only a small percentage actually make it to the floor for debate. Each committee has a chair, who is selected by leadership. It's important to know if your member of Congress serves as a committee chair.

Committees are structured by issues, for example:

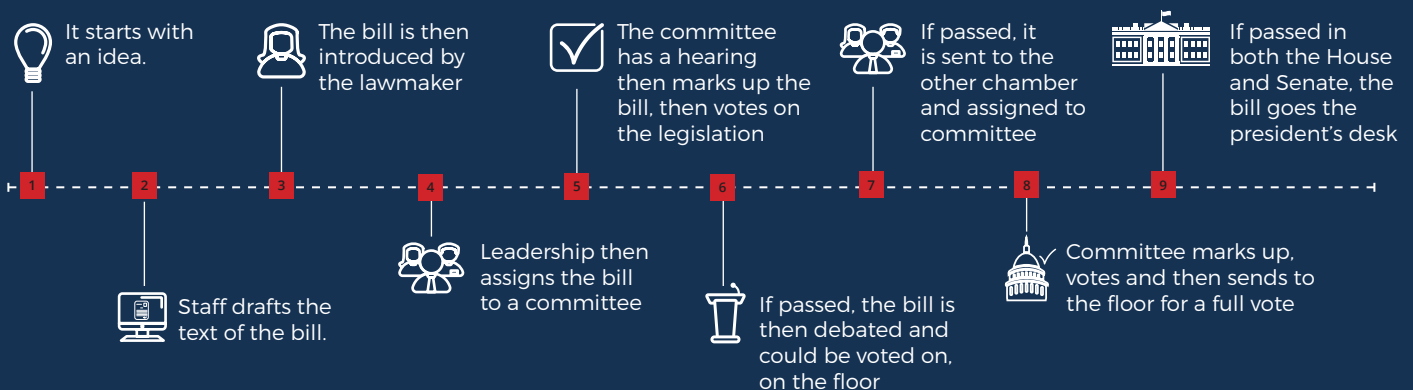
- Agriculture
- Education and the Workforce
- Energy and Commerce
- Judiciary
- Transportation & Infrastructure
- Veterans' Affairs

There are four types of congressional committees:

1. **Standing Committees** - These continue from one Congress to the next, and are arguably the most important because they consider the vast majority of proposed laws.
2. **Select Committees** - These are temporary and serve specific purposes. Often they study a particular issue and usually do not draft legislation, but rather investigate.
3. **Joint Committees** - These serve a similar purpose as select committees, but they are made up of members from both chambers. They are set up to help focus public attention on major issues.
4. **Conference Committees** - These are specially created for the House and Senate to reconcile different versions of the same bill. It's made up of members from the committees that originally considered the bill. Once revised, the bill is returned to both chambers for their approval.

It's important to know what committees your members of Congress are a part of.

## HOW AN IDEA BECOMES A BILL



## WORDS YOU SHOULD KNOW

### AMENDMENT

A proposed change to pending text.

### AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE

Seeks to replace the entire text of a measure.

### APPROPRIATION BILL

A legislative measure that allows the government to spend money - it is a bill that sets money aside for specific spending.

### BILL

Primary form of legislation used to propose a law.

### CLOSED RULE

A rule granted by the House Rules Committee that prohibits amendments to a particular bill during floor action.

### CLOTURE

Special to the Senate only, the method by which a super-majority (usually three-fifths) of the Senate may agree to limit debate and consideration of a bill, amendment or other matter.

### COMPANION MEASURE

Identical, or substantially similar, bill in the other chamber.

### CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

Used for regulation of business in both chambers, not for proposed laws.

### EARMARK

A provision that allocates funds, tax exemptions or tariffs for specific special interest projects.

### EXECUTIVE ORDER

A rule or order issued by the president to an executive branch of the government and having the force of law.

### FILIBUSTER

A tactic specific to the Senate, sometimes using prolonged speech, to prevent a bill from going to a vote.

### HEARING

A formal meeting used to gather information from witnesses that can be used for developing legislation, investigations, or in the Senate, for nominations.

### HOUSE RULES COMMITTEE

Responsible for reporting "special rules" that tailor terms for debate.

### JOINT RESOLUTION

Propose changes in law, or to propose an amendment to the U.S. Constitution - depending on the chamber of origin, they begin with a designation of either H.J.Res. or S.J.Res.

### LAME DUCK CONGRESS

The time between when Congress meets after its successors are elected, but before the successor's term begins.

### MARKUP

Meeting by a committee or subcommittee where members offer, debate and vote on amendments to a measure.

### OMNIBUS

A single bill that combines in a single vote multiple, unrelated items.

### OPEN RULE

A set of regulations for debate on the floor of the House of Representatives which permits general debate and allows members to offer amendments on a bill freely and until everyone is done.

## EXTRA CREDIT WORDS

### HEAD PAT

A vote or action to appease a specific organization or constituency but it actually doesn't mean anything.

### MEME

A false argument perpetuated by groups of people (think: Congressional rumor).

### SHINY OBJECT

Legislation or an issue that has good talking points but doesn't have substance and is meant to distract from the real issue.

### SHOW VOTE

A vote that doesn't really amount to anything, just gives lawmakers a talking point when they report back to constituents.

## WHAT IS POLITICAL ACTIVISM?

Things to remember about activism:

### YOUR VOICE MATTERS

- ▶ Activists can make a huge difference in informing both the community and Congress about the importance of certain issues. By informing and rallying the community behind a cause, you force politicians to take notice and listen to what the citizens in their district are saying. Members of Congress specifically have to be very aware of what their constituents want and have to take the will of their voters into consideration every day.

### MEMBERS ARE ACCOUNTABLE TO YOU

- ▶ Members of Congress are voted into their positions by individual constituents. They are more likely to listen to a coalition of voters in their district/state than lobbying firms and policy organizations. When it comes to swaying the legislative branch, the voice of the individual truly matters.

### HISTORY PROVES ITS SUCCESS

- ▶ During this great country's founding, a small group of patriots banded together in order to hold their government accountable. Although the government has changed, the principle of this act remains the same. Today, more than ever, we need patriots like our founders advocating on our behalf in order to make sure our government is kept in check.



### CONTINUED GROWTH

- ▶ The conservative grassroots movement is growing with every passing day. The only way that we can effectively hold Congress accountable is by making sure it continues to grow.

# IMPACTING CONGRESS

## STEP 1: KNOW THE ISSUES

Find an issue that interests you and become an expert—you might end up knowing more about legislation than staff of your Member of Congress. Equally important, know where to find the most up-to-date and reliable information.

### GOOGLE ALERTS

- ▶ Set up a Google Alert to stay updated when your member is mentioned in the news, sends a press release or issues a statement. You'll receive an email notification that will alert you whenever the keyword(s) you set appear online.

Go to [www.google.com/alerts](http://www.google.com/alerts) to get started. Create an alert for the issue you're monitoring, your Member of Congress, a specific bill and anything else you feel will help equip you with the knowledge you need to further develop your activism efforts.

### TWITTER

- ▶ While Twitter is a social media channel, it's also an important source of news. As stories break, reporters, media outlets, political leaders, and citizens tweet what is going on around them. You can see what topics and hashtags are trending—but we'll dive deeper into the world of Twitter later.

*An example of breaking news view Twitter:*



### MAJOR MEDIA OUTLETS

- ▶ It's important to follow trends and know what the media is talking about. Monitor major conservative outlets to know which issues are making national headlines.

**Examples:** *Fox News, Daily Signal, The Hill, Morning Consult, Washington Examiner, etc.*





## STEP 2: TRACK YOUR MEMBER

Tracking your Member of Congress is crucial to accountability.

### ▶ KNOW THEIR HERITAGE ACTION SCORE

- ▶ The [Heritage Action scorecard](#) is one of the most revealing ratings of members. By issuing “key votes,” Congress knows we are watching and will hold them accountable for which side of an issue they take. We make sure each office has the information they need to take an informed, conservative position before casting a vote. We evaluate every issue, big and small, to ensure accuracy of our scoring methods by making sure members stick to principles.

### ▶ SIGN UP FOR THEIR NEWSLETTER

- ▶ Make sure you are signed up to receive your Member of Congress’s newsletter. This is a great resource to see what issues are important enough for them to include, so you can gauge what their priorities are. If something is not mentioned, that gives you the opportunity to educate them.

### ▶ FOLLOW THEM ON SOCIAL MEDIA

- ▶ **Facebook**  
“Like” their official Congressional Facebook page, sometimes they have a separate campaign page—know which is the official page by checking the description.
- ▶ **Twitter**  
“Follow” their Congressional Twitter account, sometimes they have a separate account for their campaign but anything related to policy and their official duties will be on their Congressional account.
- ▶ **Google alerts**  
Just like you would for an issue, set an alert for their name. For example: “Medicare AND Jim Jordan” is a specific alert.



## STEP 3: COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR MEMBER

Do not be afraid to engage.

### ▶ CONTACTING YOUR CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE

#### ▶ By email

To send an email to your lawmaker, call your Congressional office and ask for the name and email address of the Legislative Assistant that covers the issue you are writing about. Present facts and anecdotes in your email, and note that you're available to discuss the issue further. Be sure to edit for spelling and grammar, and also state that you're a constituent and your connection to the issue.

#### ▶ By letter

Members of Congress get hundreds of letters every day. It's important that you keep a formal tone, present facts and information, and address the letter properly.

Example:

The Honorable (full name)  
(Room #) (Name) House or Senate Office Building  
United States House of Representatives or United States Senate  
Washington, DC (For House: 20515) (For Senate: 20510)

#### ▶ By phone

Here's an example of how a typical phone conversation would go when you call the office:

**Intern:** Congressman Smith's office, how may I help you?

**Activist:** Hello, my name is Jack Miller. I am a constituent of Congressman Smith's and would like to talk to your LA who handles budget issues.

**Intern:** Okay, can you tell me what the call is related to?

**Activist:** I would like to talk to them about the upcoming Defense Appropriations bill that is going through the committee he sits on and the proposed Gosar amendment.

**Intern:** Okay let me see if they are available. (More often than not they will not be available to speak)

**Intern:** I'm sorry but our LA is not available at this moment, may I take a message?

**Activist:** Not a problem, I understand you guys are very busy. Can you please let them know I am opposed to the gun control amendment because it does not do enough to protect law-abiding citizens. If you could just have them give me a call back at 999-999-9999, I would love the opportunity to speak with them and provide some further information.

### ▶ KNOW THEIR OFFICE LOCATION

- ▶ Office visits are a great way to build relationships with staff. In addition to their Washington, D.C. office each member has a district office, or sometimes multiple. You can find out the location by visiting their Congressional website.

**TIP:** Bring donuts or a sweet treat when you make an office visit.



### ▶ ATTEND TOWN HALLS AND LOCAL EVENTS

- ▶ Keep an eye out for upcoming town halls hosted by your Member of Congress—following them on social media and signing up for their newsletter are great ways to know when the next one is scheduled.

If you attend a town hall, be prepared to ask tough questions by equipping yourself with details on upcoming legislation. Know which bills your member is sponsoring or co sponsoring, and any legislative priorities they have.

**Following up is key!**

## OFFICE HIERARCHY

### CHIEF OF STAFF

Member of Congress's chief policy advisor. A chief of staff will develop and implement policy objectives, strategies and operating plans for the member's office.

### LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR (LD)

Will advise the member on all legislative areas. A legislative director helps develop policy positions and legislative initiatives.

### COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

Fields call from the media, writes press releases, handles most social media efforts, and acts as the official spokesperson for the Member.

### LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT (LA)

Tracks legislation and other developments in assigned issue areas, monitors legislative developments within the committees and floor, and will help prepare for committee meetings and hearings.

### LEGISLATIVE CORRESPONDENT (LC)

Handles communications with constituents including writing response letters for mail from constituents. A legislative correspondent may also assist the legislative assistants.

### SCHEDULER

Manages the member's calendar and travel arrangements.

### STAFF ASSISTANT

Answers phones and emails, greets visitors, sorts mail, and provides tours of the Capitol in addition to other administrative tasks.

### INTERN

Congressional offices will typically have interns for most of the year. Interns will primarily be the ones who are answering phones and serve as the direct connection between the offices and constituents.



**In addition to having a Washington, D.C. office, each Member also has district staff that handles majority of casework. These positions include district director, caseworkers and more.**

# GROW YOUR INFLUENCE

## NETWORKING



### IDENTIFY CONSERVATIVE LEADERS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Whether it's the chair of your local tea party organization, county GOP, or another group dedicated to achieving the same goals, you need to build relationships with these leaders in order to make the biggest impact in your community.



### GROUPS YOU ALREADY BELONG TO

(Your church, gym, etc.) Identify those who care about civic responsibility and strike up a casual conversation to see what issues they care about.



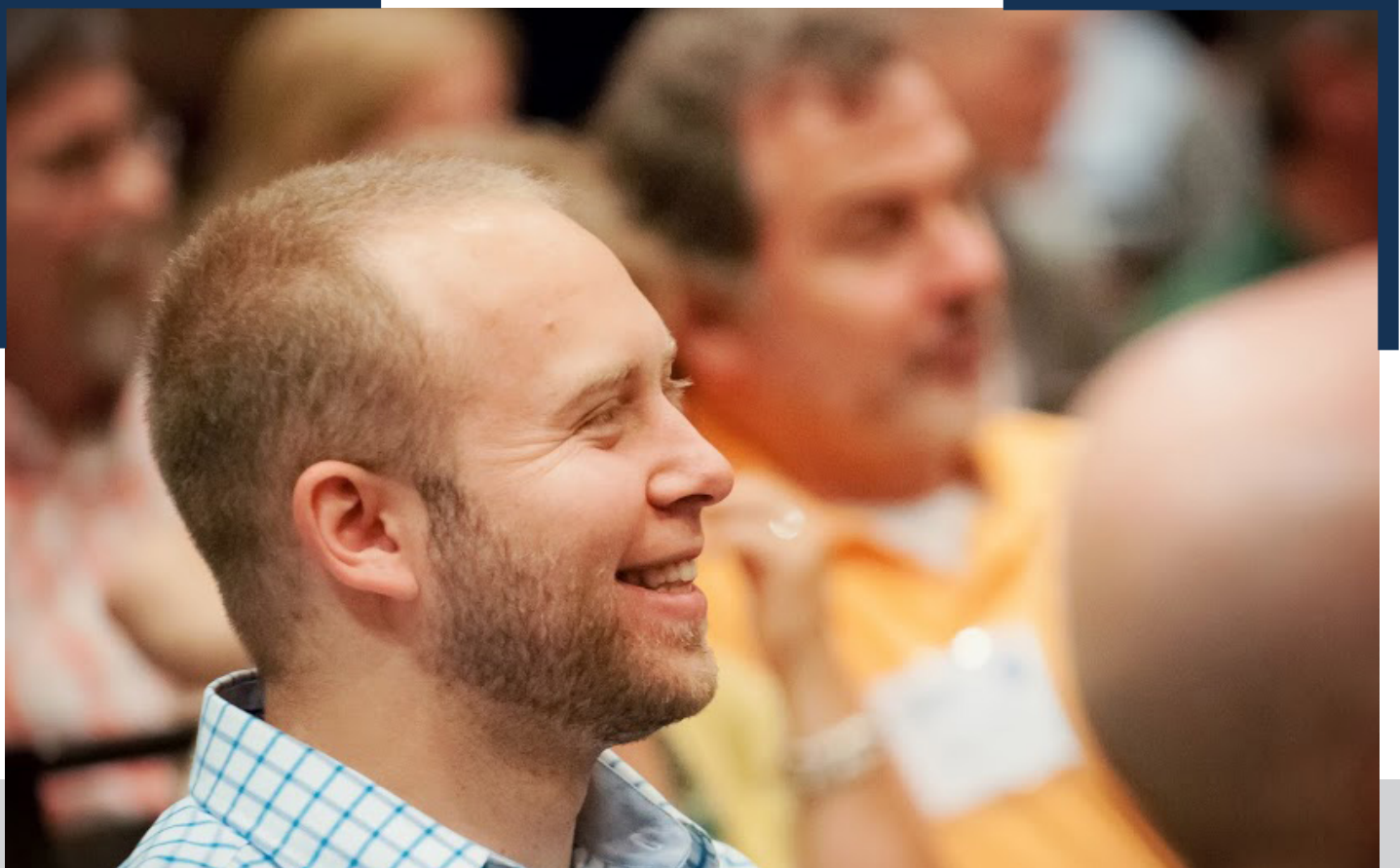
### LOCAL EVENTS

Is there an upcoming event in your community that is expected to draw a crowd? Being present and meeting as many people in your community as possible is critical to growing your influence.



### BUILDING COALITIONS

Partner with other groups in which you have a common denominator. The more groups that support something, the more impact you have. It also increases the likelihood that a public official could be influenced by your cause or event.



# SPREADING THE CONSERVATIVE MESSAGE

## SOCIAL MEDIA



### FACEBOOK

Being active on Facebook has many benefits. In addition to online networking through “adding friends,” you have the opportunity to seek and provide news to those you’re connected with through your newsfeed. This is a great tool to communicate with those in your community.

### TIPS FOR POSTING ON FACEBOOK

1. Set your privacy on individual posts (to the left of the post button, there’s a button and you can select who sees the post -- public, friends, or you can even customize it by clicking “more options”).
2. If you want a lot of eyes to see your post, it’s most effective to share with the public.
3. Tag friends in your post. You can do this by placing the @ symbol before typing in their name in the actual text of your status, or you can click the tab all the way to the bottom left of the status box and tag them.



4. Share links to articles or videos by copying the URL and pasting the link. Add a description so people know what it’s about.
5. Add pictures, people enjoy visuals and knowing what you’re up to! Tag your friends that are pictured so their friends can see as well.



### TWITTER

This is especially useful for communicating with those who tend to be more politically engaged. Reporters, Members of Congress and their staffers break news by tweeting as things happen.

#### Tweetfest

By branding the conversation through the use of a hashtag (#), you lift your issue to national attention. Media checks trending hashtags to find out what people are interested in, and they often base news stories on those top trending stories.

#### EXAMPLE:

- *#Defend1A was used by activists to bring attention a current piece of legislation regarding religious liberty*

### TIPS FOR POSTING ON TWITTER

1. Describe yourself in your bio and keep it short. You can include that you’re conservative, your favorite sports team, an alumni of your school, or any other information that might help people find and follow your account.
2. See what hashtags (#) are trending in the U.S. and your city on your homepage in the left column. Use this to see what people are talking about and insert your thoughts into the conversation.
3. Mention people in your tweet by placing the @ symbol before their account handle.

#### Example of a Tweet:



# LOCAL



## TRACK LOCAL MEDIA OUTLETS

This is important to know what the buzz is in your community, and you can use your knowledge to write letters to the editor in order to bring an issue to light.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR TIPS

1. Keep your focus on one particular issue, and be sure to back with facts!
2. Keep a formal tone and polite throughout the letter.
3. Don't insinuate or proclaim anything unless you can back it up with solid evidence
4. Make a personal connection to the topic you're writing about, it makes it more compelling and credible.
5. Keep it short. Most local papers have a limit of up to 250 words, some larger outlets have shorter limits -- be sure to know these requirements.

Example of a Letter to the Editor:

## NO HEARING, NO VOTE ON CONFIRMATIONS

Democrats claim the Senate has a constitutional duty to hold a confirmation hearing for the president's nominee to the Supreme Court (Chief Judge Merrick Garland). They are telling their supporters a convenient fabrication — one that is worthy of five Pinocchios.

The truth is our Founding Fathers had the wisdom to create a system of checks and balances that allows for nominees to the bench to be appointed "by the Advice and Consent of the Senate." It remains within the president's power to make his nomination to the Supreme Court, but the Senate is under no obligation to confirm that nominee. The Senate made this clear — an eyelash short of 200 years ago.

There is no doubt Democrats will make it politically uncomfortable on the Senate Republicans; therefore we must make the Republican majority in the Senate hear our cry of support for no hearings no votes.

The Senate Republicans must stand their ground and make use of the "Biden Rule." One must remember Vice President Joe Biden opposed a successor to the Supreme Court during an election year when he was a senator from Delaware.

There must be no hearings and no votes until the American people have been allowed their opinion in November — regarding who should be making this important appointment to the Supreme Court.



## HOSTING EVENTS

Hosting an event can be a great way to garner community support on an issue and connect conservatives. It should have a clear purpose, be well-planned, and invite the right crowd to attend.



# WHAT IS A SENTINEL?

Sentinels are knowledgeable conservative activists who take meaningful action to hold their Member of Congress accountable.

Sentinels come from all backgrounds across the country with the common goal of holding Congress accountable. Heritage Action works with you individually, building your knowledge, growing your influence, and preparing you to take meaningful action. Sentinels commit to partnering with us to stand guard for freedom, lead in their circles of influence, and communicate with elected officials. They know the issues, grow their activist skills and networks and go out and lead in their communities.

**Take the first step today to becoming an even more effective conservative activist.**

## 4 SIMPLE STEPS TO BECOME A HERITAGE ACTION SENTINEL

### 01

#### COMPLETE AN INFLUENCE PROFILE

Submit a 3 minute questionnaire about your past experience and more information.

### 02

#### SPEAK WITH OUR PLACEMENT SPECIALISTS

A Heritage Action DC team member will arrange a phone call to discuss your specific interests, answer any questions you have and help identify what training, support and coaching you need to deepen your activist journey.

### 03

#### MEET YOUR ACTIVISM COACH

You will meet your Heritage Action grassroots representative who will work with you to build your activism skills, provide direct information from DC and walk alongside you in the journey to turn the country around.

### 04

#### BECOME A HERITAGE ACTION SENTINEL

Get exclusive access to a weekly briefing call direct from Heritage Action's DC based team, access to issue briefs, FAQ sheets and an online community of activists.



**Complete your influence profile today:**

**<http://heritageaction.com/sentinel>**

 [@heritageforamerica](https://www.facebook.com/heritageforamerica)

 [@heritage\\_action](https://twitter.com/heritage_action)

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As a 501 (c)(4) and sister organization of The Heritage Foundation, Heritage Action for America is a widely respected government relations team and group of committed conservative activists doing the hard work of Congressional accountability.