



# **USW Guide to Lobbying**

## **Speaking up to make life better for people**

### **Introduction**

A union's core power is its membership and strength in numbers.

That's how local bargaining committees harness their union's power in collective bargaining to improve the lives of local members. For the United Steelworkers union (USW) it's also part of our efforts to improve workers' lives and to build a better future by advocating for better laws and policies. This advocacy takes many forms, from petitions to protests, and directly lobbying politicians and decision-makers to introduce and pass the laws, policies and changes workers and their families need.

Rank-and-file USW members meet with politicians and other decision-makers in their communities and in the parliamentary and legislative offices. By telling our personal stories and experiences, we make the case for what workers need, why the decision-makers must deliver worker-centred change, and how this change is possible.

The USW's direct lobbying is basically workers talking to the people whose job it is to listen to them about what they know, what they've experienced and what they need.

Welcome to the world of USW lobbying!

### **Who we are**

The United Steelworkers union (USW) represents 225,000 members in nearly every economic sector across Canada and is the largest private-sector union in North America, with 850,000 members in Canada, the United States and the Caribbean.

Each year, thousands of workers choose to join the USW because of the union's strong track record in creating healthier, safer and more respectful workplaces and negotiating better working conditions and fairer compensation – including good wages, benefits and pensions.

### **What lobbying is**

Lobbying is simply telling public officials what you think with the goal of convincing them to do something to improve laws and policy.

Lobbying can take many forms, including:

- Telephone calls
- Face-to-face conversations
- Letter-writing campaigns
- E-mails
- Presentations to councils or to hearings

If you've ever done any of these things, you've lobbied.

When you lobby as part of your union, you're bringing a lot of strength with you. The USW is recognized as an influential player when it comes to protecting workers' rights and extending progressive legislation.

In addition to union leadership and staff who meet with decision-makers regularly, the real power of our union's lobbying comes from the meetings USW members have with elected representatives and the people who advise them.

## **Why lobby?**

In short: because our opponents do it – a lot.

Employers and industry associations lobby all the time. They push for changes that will help them get richer and limit workers' rights and suppress our wages and other benefits. They often hire high-priced professionals to do their lobbying.

In contrast, as union members we give decision-makers the opportunity to sit across from the people their decisions will affect the most. It's powerful for them to hear directly from the people they represent, and whose votes they need – if they want to keep their jobs.

On top of being important, lobbying is also fun. Members who take part gain a big-picture perspective of the issues, get to make a real difference for workers, and help to strengthen the union as a whole by putting real faces to those membership numbers and the jobs we do.

## **Who we lobby**

Anyone involved in the decision-making process is worth lobbying.

In Canada, federally elected representatives are called Members of Parliament, or MPs. Those who are elected to sit in provincial and territorial legislatures are usually called Members of the Legislative Assembly or MLAs but some provinces have different names for them. In Ontario they are called Members of Provincial Parliament, or MPPs; in Quebec, they are Members of the National Assembly (MNAs); and in Newfoundland and Labrador, they are called Members of the House of Assembly.

Municipal politicians can have a variety of titles, including mayors, reeves and councillors.

In addition to elected representatives, there are staff at all levels who advise the politicians, as well as public servants. Federally, despite being unaccountable and unelected, Senators also have a role in the passage of legislation, so it can be important to meet with them as well.

No matter their title or the level of their job, workers deserve to have their voices heard, and Steelworkers are there to make sure they are.

## How we lobby directly

Direct lobbying is easier than it sounds.

It consists of meeting face-to-face with decision-makers and influencers, asking them to take a position on a particular policy or piece of legislation and to follow through by advocating or voting accordingly on that issue.

During these meetings, USW members back up their asks by sharing personal experiences and how a change of law, regulation, or policy will affect them, their families, communities and their workplaces. It is also common to have a few facts to share. That's it.

Staying comfortable and being yourself is key to making a real impact in these meetings. They typically last about 15 to 30 minutes and almost always go faster than you think. While you shouldn't prepare a written speech, it's important to prepare for these meetings and to make a solid plan, giving some thought in advance about what you want to say.

Prior to the meeting:

- **Contact** the office of the person you want to meet and ask for an appointment. Be clear how many people will be attending, what your meeting is about, and how much time you're being offered.
- **Decide** exactly what you want to talk about and ask for. It can be tempting to bring a long list, but that can either confuse the person you're meeting or give them an excuse to not do what you're really asking of them. Try to stick to between one and three priorities.
- **Prepare** one or two personal stories about how the status quo has hurt you, your colleagues or your workplace. Make it clear how the changes you're requesting will fix the problem. Keep these stories short.
- **Strengthen** your pitch by bringing along one or two other people to back you up and help hold the person you're meeting accountable.
- **Plan** the order in which your team will speak.
- **Bring** something that you can leave behind. Ideally, this is a short document that summarizes and supports your requests – usually available through the USW.

After your meeting:

- **Ensure** you have clear notes about what was said and any commitments that were made in the meeting.
- **Follow through** on any commitments you made.
- **Send** a letter to the person with whom you met to thank them for the meeting and to document any commitments they made.
- **Let us know** who you met with. Fill out the lobbying form so we can keep track of all the meetings USW members are having.

## Frequently asked questions

*What should I wear?*

Most of the time, the people you are meeting with will likely be in either business or business casual clothing. It's a good general rule to aim to do the same. But it is also very important to feel comfortable and to be yourself. So, if a suit and tie or blouse and blazer are not your thing, dress as formally as feels right.

Bottom line: As long as you avoid ripped and tattered clothing as well as graphic clothing that could reasonably be considered offensive, and you remember that you're representing your union, you should be fine.

*How do I refer to the people I'm meeting?*

In the Canadian system, formal titles are used less often than what you might see on TV.

In writing, a Cabinet minister is addressed as, "The Honourable (first and last name), M.L.A. Minister of (name of ministry, e.g. Energy and Mines). The prime Minister is "The Right Honourable (first and last name).

While meeting them, Mr./Mrs./Ms, etc., will do. However, to avoid making assumptions on gender and to show more respect, "Minister," "Premier," or "Prime Minister" also work.

For those who are not in cabinet, usually the common salutations of Ms. or Mr., etc., are appropriate, but again, to avoid complications, it's often easiest to start off the meeting by asking what they prefer.

*Should I know about lobbying laws and the "Lobbyist Registry"?*

Unless you spend more than 20% of your time lobbying, the laws don't actually apply to you, so you shouldn't worry about all of those technicalities.

To be on the safe side though, it's important to enter these meetings in good faith and lobby directly without making any promises of financial or material things that you could offer the person you're meeting to benefit them personally. It goes without saying, we don't want to ever threaten them personally either.

*What if I don't feel like I'm ready?*

This is another benefit of being part of the USW. Solidarity and strength in numbers come through in a lot of ways, including when you want help to prepare for a lobby meeting.

You can contact your local executive, staff representatives, district staff, or even your colleagues who have experience. Please also feel free to connect with a member of our Communications and Political Action Department at the Canadian National Office.

There are a number of steps and while the government has more power than other legislators to change regulations, amend policies and pass laws, every elected official has the opportunity to present and vote on legislation.

While we like to target ministers and people in the Prime Minister's and Premiers' offices, every meeting matters.

## **USW lobbying success**

Yes, lobbying works.

It can take time, but our own history teaches us that patience, preparation and persistence pay off in politics.

USW lobbying successes include our campaign for the **Westray Law** – amendments to the Criminal Code that hold companies, executives and directors criminally accountable for workplace injuries and deaths.

Lobbying for what is now known as the Westray Law took over a decade. (That's a lot of meetings!)

Following the deadly 1992 Westray mine explosion in Nova Scotia that killed 26 miners, Steelworkers and the broader labour movement pushed successive federal governments for changes to make workplaces safer.

The Westray Bill was passed in November 2003 and came into force in 2004. Despite how long it took, and the fact that improvements still need to be made, passing Westray is widely considered a victory by the labour movement and the USW in particular.

Another example is the USW's **Workers First** campaign, a lobbying effort to give workers and retirees priority consideration when corporations go bankrupt or into restructuring.

For years, the USW has brought to MPs and Senators the heartbreaking stories of workers who had their pensions robbed because they were forced to the back of the line when their employer went bankrupt.

In April 2023, with the support of opposition parties in Ottawa and partners in the labour movement, the USW finally won protection for workers' pensions.

Another important USW lobbying victory in 2023 resulted in the **first-ever union-led Canadian trade complaint**. Before this USW win, workers had to rely on employers to

file complaints on unfair trade practices. More than just winning that change, the USW also won our first trade case and secured an investigation by the Canada Border Services Agency against the dumping and subsidizing of mattresses produced in China. This win is just the beginning, as more complaints are being filed.

Federal **anti-scab legislation** has long been a call of the labour movement and USW has been at the forefront of this demand. Despite repeatedly promising a form of anti-scab legislation in the past and yet voting against it every time, the federal Liberals have finally started the process of implementing a law to ban so-called replacement workers in the event of a strike or lockout.

This potential win is the result of the NDP forcing it into the Supply and Confidence Agreement. Our work continues to make sure the Liberals follow through and not only introduce this legislation, but actually pass a law that doesn't include loopholes that will allow the continued use of scabs.

That's why lobbying and the campaigns it supports need to continue. We can keep the pressure on the people we've elected, and keep delivering for the workers we represent.