



“How to Work with the Media on Oversight Investigations”

Congressional Training Program Seminar
August 26, 2016 – Roberta Baskin, panelist

10 TIPS to forging success with the media...

10 boxes to check. Do all 10 and your chances of a successful partnership with the media are greatly enhanced.

First, **Know Your Message:** If you are asked to develop media for an upcoming hearing, the first thing you *don't* do is call Wolf Blitzer or Chris Matthews and try to slot your Chairman in an early prime time TV slot. That's something you might do later on *after* you have developed a plan, and that begins with determining the message you're trying to sell. Write the headline you'd like to see:

Committee on Campaign Oversight Subpoenas Donald and Hillary on Suspected Vote Fixing Scheme.

You need to make a pitch. You will be lucky to get one chance. But when that chance comes, it most probably will be your only chance.

Second, **Know Your Audience:** The technology makes it easy to adjust your targets. Are they a particular constituency of the Chairman's or committee members? Is it a broad, national, even international audience you want to reach? Digital technology lets you customize your message, depending on the audience, with ease.

Third, **You're The Producer:** Once you've developed your message, you have to put into story form – with a beginning, middle and end. Make it easy for readers and viewers to follow and, most importantly, easy for newspaper reporters and broadcast producers to understand. It gives you greater ability to control the content and, to be honest, some media outlets like to be spoon-fed.

Fourth, **What's Your Story? The Elevator Pitch:** A committee has particular oversight over a department or program. If it decides an investigation is warranted, you get 10 floors to explain why I should care. Pocketbook issues, Consumer issues, Food, Health, Defense, Safety, Government Corruption are media favorites. If those issues are attached to a victim, even better. Be creative. Your mission here is to inform and educate your audience. If you have to rely on a flair for the dramatic to do so, that's all fair game. Always think “storytelling”.

Fifth, **Bipartisanship!** The media is thirsting for any evidence of bipartisanship within the Congress, any glimmer of hope that could finally help reverse the public's historically low opinion of the institution. Coordination of committee action between the two parties automatically enhances your chance of success with the media. On the other hand, any action launched with obvious political intent will fall flat.

Sixth, **What Time Is It?:** Whatever the issue, the committee action or schedule of events, you need to think through all of it to an estimated conclusion. Determine mileposts along the way: news conferences, testimony of important witnesses, conclusions and votes. This not only helps the media plan their coverage, it also helps you determine your resources.

Seventh, **Plan of Attack:** Launching your media campaign is an involved process. You have ample choices of outlets: local news, network news, cable news, C-Span, radio, the WSJ, NYT and Washington Post, a number of other good regional newspapers depending on the issue. Make a list and develop a strategy for connecting with them. And in what form? Again, there are ample choices: calling a news conference, offering your chairman for a one-on-one interview, making him part of a more in-depth video report, for *60 Minutes* perhaps, a conversation with influential opinion writers. And, of course, there is social media. That could be 50% of your media effort. You need a social media aficionado on staff.

Eighth, **The Media are My Friends!:** Once you developed your "hit list" of media targets, you need to identify the best contact, or develop a way of getting to that person. If it's a quick, news breaking issue, you want to know who the television network assignment editors are, and you want to develop an ongoing dialogue with the political producers, as well as with the specialized reporters at newspapers and broadcast news. As happened to me several times, look for opportunities to expand on the work of the journalists. I have testified before Congressional Committees several times and, in the case of the Inspector General's Office at HHS, they not only opened an investigation as a result of my series on pediatric dentists performing unnecessary baby root canals, they offered me a job! So don't be hesitant to develop working relationships with the media. If they know you want to make them look good, they'll be inclined to make you look good.

Ninth, **The Exclusive:** At the outset of developing your media plan, you need to determine the possible benefits of partnering with a particular member of the media as part of your strategy. Offering exclusive access and information to a media "partner" gives you a degree of control over the content and the telling of the story, all of which has to be determined at the outset.

Tenth, **I'll Do It Myself:** Advances in digital technology allows anyone to create their own media machine. Through the simple use of an iPhone, Skype, blogs, Twitter, Facebook and a number of other distribution chains, you can develop, produce, and distribute your message to an audience of your choice.