

The Path to Political Office: Encouraging Involvement in the Political Process

Missouri State Rep. Bart Korman,
P.E.



Engineering Public Policy

Advanced Leadership



Bart Korman

- **Missouri State Representative**
 - Elected in 2010
 - Chairman, Telecommunications Committee
 - Vice Chairman, Transportation Committee
- **Professional Engineer**
 - PE/PLS for small civil firm in Warrenton, MO
 - Design and manage projects for private and public clients (including water, waste, storm drainage, grading, site plan, and subdivision development)

Informed Opinion

- **Having a background in engineering uniquely shapes my perception in policymaking.**
- **Making the right connections and using industry-specific language helps to clarify issues and frame them in a better context.**

Why should I be politically active?

- **Public officials want reasonable and unbiased information prior to making decisions.**
- **Engineers are greatly affected by public policy:**
 - **Transportation**
 - **Utilities**
 - **Environment**
 - **Public Safety**
 - **Patents**
 - **Licensure**

Typical Day

- **9 a.m. – Meet with a constituent**
 - They made a special trip just to see me, hoping to educate me on an issue that affects them.
- **9:15 a.m. – Breakfast with State Senator**
 - Sharing unique knowledge of an area can be helpful in representing our shared constituents.
- **9:45 a.m. – Chat with a lobbyist**
 - Knowing they have a bill coming through, this is likely their last chance to catch me before voting.
- **10 a.m. – Morning Session**
 - House Members are expected to be in the Chamber, ready to vote on the business for the day.

- **12:30 p.m. – Telecommunications Committee**
 - As committee chairman, I have to be ready to lead a hearing and ask the right questions of the witnesses that come forward.
- **12:30 p.m. – Transportation Committee**
 - As a bill sponsor, I testify on its behalf in front of the relevant committee. Often, committees meet at the same time, so I have to travel between hearing rooms.
- **2 p.m. – Afternoon Session**
 - Especially near the end of our legislative session (January through May), discussion often requires a continuation later in the day.
- **2:30 p.m. – Stakeholder Meeting**
 - I work with interested parties on a bill in my committee or that I'm handling on the House floor.

- **4 p.m. – School Tour**
 - With field trips to the Capitol being a necessity for Missouri 4th graders, I'll often get to sit with students from my district and talk about my job.
- **5 p.m. – Utility Infrastructure Committee**
 - As a member of the committee, I make sure to study up on the legislation that will be discussed and make the most of my time with more informed members and witnesses.
- **7 p.m. – Evening Session**
 - Sometimes going well into the night, Evening Session ensures we finish the agenda items necessary for the day.
- **9 p.m. – Late Dinner**
 - After a long legislative day, I still make time to have discussions with colleagues over a last minute meal before heading home to the district.

Balancing Campaign and Public Service

- **The ethics standards surrounding a campaign are different from those of public service.**
- **It's important to know the rules, the regulating body, and the consequences before engaging in any political activity.**

Campaign Ethics

- In Missouri, campaigns report to the Missouri Ethics Commission.
- All dollars and cents must be accounted for in a campaign, and the MEC monitors donor lists.
- Accepting campaign donations should never indicate *quid pro quo*.
- Campaign activity should stop at the Capitol doors. The building serves the public, not the individual legislators.

Public Service Ethics

- The Missouri Ethics Commission is also the regulating body for registered lobbyists and reporting their expenditures.
- Most legislative bodies will have ethics committees responsible for investigating and deliberating member behaviors.
- When in doubt, err on the side of caution and transparency.

DO

- **DO** keep up to date on the rules and regulations regarding lobbying.
- **DO** establish and develop friendly discussions from both sides of an issue (information is power in decision-making).
- **DO** know where to ask questions and report your activity.
- **DO** protect your office/client by acting in all due propriety.

DON'T

- **DON'T** attempt to buy or sell votes in exchange for gifts or donations.
- **DON'T** be secretive regarding your connections to certain industries or issues.
- **DON'T** put yourself in a no-win situation when it comes to ethics regulation.
- **DON'T** be afraid to say, “No, thank you.” When in doubt, it’s best to just say no.

Communicating with Legislators

- **Keep it local.**
- **Keep it personal.**
- **Keep it concise.**
- **Put it in writing.**

Keep it local

- State legislators are most concerned about their constituents and the issues that affect them.
- The more specific your information is to their home district, the more likely it is to be effective.
- Take the effort to learn about similar businesses/firms in the area. Applying your information to a real-life example the legislator is familiar with can be incredibly persuasive.

Keep it personal

- **State legislators can tell when there is real effort put into any communication. The more effort put forth, the more likely you will receive a response.**
- **Personal cards, phone calls, and visits are more memorable than form letters that every staff office will receive.**

Keep it concise

- **Legislator offices are busy environments, and long messages regarding a confusing topic are often too time-consuming. Save the heavy explanations for a follow-up.**
- **The simpler the original message, the more likely it is to elicit a response. Even better, it can provoke questions that give you an opportunity to elaborate.**

Put it in writing

- **A written communication provides a readily available record in the office, which can be used later when the legislator has a chance to address the issue.**
- **After a phone call or in-person meeting, follow up with a brief email summarizing the content of the visit and reiterating your position.**
- **Always make sure to include your contact information, networking at this level is pertinent.**

“ But I don’t know anyone.”

- **Everyone has to start somewhere.**
- **Make an appointment with your state representative and state senator.**
- **Research relevant committees and legislation to your particular issue.**
- **Be prepared with fact sheets, anecdotes, and district-specific experiences to share.**
- **When in doubt, ask.**

The Takeaway

- Lay the groundwork before issues come up.
- Be knowledgeable about the subject when the issues do come up. Be a resource by offering short, factual, and informative meetings.
- Every minute counts in a legislative day, so appreciate every minute you can catch.
- Be courteous, positive, and **politely** ask for support.

Questions?

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