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### A Rationale For Political Involvement

Part of the conventional wisdom of nurses is that health and politics do not mix. To many, the word “politics” conjures up images of shady deals, political patronage, interference in the delivery of quality patient care and harmful conflict. Others limit the meaning of the word to provincial party politics. They believe that nurses’ organizations should not become involved in criticism of government policy because such activity is “unprofessional” or will result in attacks on nurses from powerful enemies. Yet the terms “politics” and “politicians”, according to the dictionary, refer to the art or science of governing. It is difficult to understand how leadership in the art or science of governing could be described as unprofessional.

Used appropriately, politics is the democratic process of making significant decisions in your local area, province, or nation. Each time nurses act to influence health policy they are involved in politics. If nurses desire changes in health care they must be good politicians and they must accept that performing as a politician to develop quality health care is a perfectly legitimate activity.

How do we make our views known and exert our influence into the decision making process? Our ability to influence the decisions of policy makers is directly related to our power base, that is, our power to influence public opinion and at times the vote during election campaigns. Nurses are credible, knowledgeable spokespersons for our health care system. We must use our credibility and knowledge to ensure that decisions made regarding our health care system are made with patient care as the focus. We must be politically active.

The preservation of a decent health care system is a goal worth fighting for. Our patients, who often have little power to affect change at what is usually a very vulnerable time in their lives, need our advocacy. They have the right to expect nurses to use modern political techniques. Otherwise, the views of those citizens who need our health care system will not receive adequate consideration in the political process of the community, province and country.

We must build political influence for health. We must understand the political system and the exercise of political power in decision making. We must earn respect in that system through our involvement and leadership. For nurses to believe that we have not been involved in politics is naive. To avoid conscious planning of our future political activity is foolishness.

## What Nurses Should Do To Lobby

There are many activities that nurses can undertake as part of a lobbying program. Anyone, any number, or all can be used depending upon each individual's desire to become involved. Realizing that the goal is to influence the political decision-makers whatever is done should be aimed at educating those legislators about the effects of continued funding reductions and the need to restore full funding to health care. There are many ways that individual nurses can be involved in such a campaign.

**LETTERS** The simplest way for a nurse to influence what is happening in health care is to write a letter to their MLA and explain what is happening. Details about how to address the letter and where to send it can be found in the section of this lobbying manual entitled MLAs. The letters should be hand-written, short and to the point explaining clearly very specific instances of the effects of the cutbacks. As well as sending the letter to the nurse's own MLA, a copy could be sent to the health critics from the other political parties. It may take some time before a response is received. Please be aware that for some MLAs letter responses are prepared and sent, so show your response to others who may have written. If yours is a form letter response, write again pointing out that your concerns are very specific and cannot be handled adequately by a form letter.

**TELEPHONE CALLS** It takes a little more confidence to phone the MLA but voicing your concerns directly may have a greater impact than simply writing a letter. Before you phone, prepare your facts in note form so that you know exactly what you are going to say when you get through to the legislator. There are two possible locations to contact your MLA. The first is through the constituency office. All but a handful of MLAs now have addresses and telephone numbers where they can be reached in their constituency. If the MLA is not available, leave a message and ask that your call be returned. The second possibility is to phone the MLAs office in the Legislature. Once again if the MLA is not available, leave a message with the secretary requesting a return call. In both cases if you do not receive a call in a couple of days please try again. There is no doubt that you must have your facts carefully marshalled when you do telephone and please endeavor to stress that what you are wanting to do is simply to provide information on the effects of government decisions on health care. E-mails have become a direct access route to many MLAs and their constituency staff.

**VISITS** Each step in the lobbying process is a little bolder. In this case,

## POLITICAL ACTION ACTIVITIES

again having marshalled the facts, phone the constituency office of your MLA and make an appointment to meet. Explain that you want to discuss government business and that you feel it is of sufficient importance that you would like to speak to your MLA face to face. Again the emphasis should be on specific examples and an assurance that you are providing evidence of the effects on patients and nursing care.

**MEETINGS** Often in the constituencies during the fall, there are political meetings for all the major political parties. In some cases these meetings are closed, for members only, and, of course, unless you are a member of the party then there is little you can do. Membership in a provincial party for one year is only about \$5 if you do decide to join. Remember, that influencing decisions from inside the party is much easier than working from the outside. However, there are occasional open meetings, either town hall style or coffee party or some other type where it is possible to go and ask publicly for the MLA to explain government policy on healthcare in light of the specific kinds of difficulties which you are experiencing in your facility or community.

**RESOLUTIONS** If you are already a member of one of the political parties then becoming active in the constituency is a further step to political involvement. The major political parties have annual conventions and during the course of the year the local/worksite executive looks for resolutions that can be presented at the convention. Now is the right time to present resolutions requesting government action on your issues to your party executive and see if they are prepared to forward it to the convention.

**DISCUSSIONS** One of the principal qualities of nurses is stoicism. Nurses do not like to complain about their workload because they are dedicated to the care of patients and that comes first. What happens, therefore, is the nurses put-up with difficult working conditions and will “make do” in all sorts of circumstances when they really should be protesting their lot.

It is legitimate for nurses to talk to friends, relatives, neighbors and parents about the difficult circumstances that have been created by years of cutbacks. Issues such as increased waiting lists, understaffing, workload staffing reports, staff mix and lack of appropriate resources are very often not known by people who do not come into direct contact with the health care system. It is time to spread the word and even to encourage individuals who feel equally angry about the results of health policies to contact their

## POLITICAL ACTION ACTIVITIES

MLA and express their concern too. In fact, the support of non-nurses in the lobbying program proposed would add enormous strength to the cause.

**ACTIONS** If you have gone this far in the lobbying program, then perhaps it is time to become involved with your local/worksites. Perhaps it is time to join the political action committee in your local/worksites, or if there isn't one, volunteer to spearhead such a committee. There is a real need to assist in organizing nurse action at the local/worksites level.

Remember to remind nurses that one vote changed France from a monarchy to a republic in 1875. One vote made Adolph Hitler head of the Nazi Party in 1923. One vote per precinct would have elected Richard Nixon rather than John Kennedy as president of the USA in 1960. One vote indeed can make a major difference. One voice added to those of others already committed can make an even greater difference.

It is time for nurses to stand up and be counted for the health of their patients. To speak up and to speak out in ensuring the health of Manitobans.

## Activities For Locals/Worksites

**There is no doubt that in the eyes of the media and the politicians, locally initiated and developed activities have a great deal more influence and impact than do provincially-organized activities. Governments like to claim to listen more to the people than to interest groups. Some actions your local/worksite can take are:**

1. Invite your local MLA by letter to all local/worksite meetings, conventions and all social functions. The MLA may choose not to come but at least cannot claim not to have been invited. It is a courtesy that should always be extended and it may be appropriate to ask the MLA to make a short presentation on a specific issue. For instance, a government MLA might make a presentation on health policy by his government; or, if an opposition MLA, on that party's stand on health and the funding of health. When the local/worksite wants to discuss health issues with the MLA, arrange a dinner, send an agenda ahead of time asking the MLA for items -- that way everyone knows what is to be discussed and much more is achieved.
2. Place the MLA on the local/worksite's mailing list for any newsletter that is produced.
3. Arrange that a prominent member of the government be asked to address a local/worksite general meeting in the fall or early spring on the issue of health care. Addresses and telephone numbers for provincial politicians can be found in the section marked MLAs in this handbook.
4. Have the local/worksite executive meet with other political parties' constituency presidents or designees to discuss nurses' concerns.
5. Prepare a brief for your MLA on the problems in the system so that concrete examples of what has happened will be available for use by the MLA in discussion.
6. Plan a letter writing campaign to your MLA or to the Minister of Health -- orchestrate it so that the campaign lasts a while and maintain the pressure.
7. Invite your MLA to come and have lunch at some of the health care facilities in the jurisdiction (after clearing it with the administration). Persuade the nurses to bring a bagged lunch and to sit and talk to the MLA about what nursing is really like. Particular emphasis should also be placed on what has happened in the facility and the effects on patients and the community.

## **POLITICAL ACTION ACTIVITIES**

Equally, the local/worksite should consider working with the health facility board, if at all possible, on specific issues. There are major advantages to having boards and nurses working together on a campaign that is directing its criticism at government reductions in funding. Equally there are other groups who should be considered when discussing alliances -- patient groups or social action groups.

**PUBLICITY** In addition to contacting MLAs and gathering group and patient support for any program, there is also a need to use the local media to advertise concerns about the effects of government decisions. Newspaper ads can be used to relay some of your concerns. Local/worksites should consider running ads in the local papers and perhaps even customizing the copy a little. Ads can also be made available as 30-second radio spots and, again, consideration should be given to running these ads on local radio stations. If cost is a problem, why not look at sharing the costs with another local/worksite whose members are in the same listening area? Very effective methods of gaining publicity for your cause are letters to the editor and call in show. They get the message out at no cost.

Also consideration might well be given to renting a billboard to proclaim your message -- one prominent location for one month may cost less than \$1,500 in total.

Whatever else might happen this year, local/worksites should consider very seriously some kind of action to bring the message home to the government that the health care system cannot absorb further cutbacks.

# HOW TO RUN AN EFFECTIVE CAMPAIGN

- ISSUES**
1. Make sure the issue in question is clear and understandable.
  2. Define the issue.
  3. Do not use jargon.
  4. Do not muddy the waters by trying to use more than one or two clearly defined issues.
  5. Keep it short and simple.

**GOALS** One of the first things a campaign must consider is its goal. How can we plan a trip if we do not know where we want to go? To maintain our sense of direction, we must have goals that are concrete and measurable. These characteristics are important as well so that we can periodically assess our situation. Are we closer to achieving our goal than we were a year ago? Are we as close as we thought we would be by now?

Our goals must also be attainable. We will only waste time and de-motivate our supporters if we focus our energies on goals that cannot be won.

Our goals should say something about us and what we believe in. They represent a point around which supporters can rally and all agree upon.

- START EARLY**
1. It takes time for an issue to develop, make sure you allow enough time for the issue to sink in.
  2. Keep repeating the same theme (you may find different ways of saying the same thing, but stick to the issue at hand).
  3. Do not get side tracked by spending time on matters that do not directly relate to the main theme.

- EDUCATE THE MEMBERS**
1. Before launching a campaign in the media, make sure the membership understands the point you are trying to make.
  2. It is useful to find a suitable slogan or catchphrase to bring the issue into focus. The slogan should capture the essence around the areas frequented by members of your group or potential supporters.

- DELEGATE**
1. Find suitable people to handle various aspects of the campaign.

## HOW TO RUN AN EFFECTIVE CAMPAIGN

**AUTHORITY** Do not try to do everything yourself.

# THE ART OF STRATEGIC THINKING

**STRATEGY AND ISSUES** Issues are problems that strategies are designed to solve. But, sometimes our goals are bigger than a particular issue and then issues are chosen to fit in with a strategy. It is important that we choose issues that do, in fact, advance our strategy. The wrong issue can dissipate our energies, confuse our supporters and even distort our goals.

**WHAT IS STRATEGY?** A strategy is a broad plan which combines separate actions in such a way as to reach the objectives sought. It is concerned with the methods by which the overall struggle is conducted.

A strategy is like a road map. We need to know where we are and where we want to end up. Our strategy tells us how to get there.

A strategy suggests immediate action projects but also provides a long-range perspective that will carry us through years of hard work, setbacks and short-term successes.

- WHAT MAKES A GOOD STRATEGY?**
1. A good strategy is planned well in advance. It anticipates what is likely to happen. It also considers what is not likely to happen but could happen.
  2. A good strategy is flexible. It leaves room for alternative plans should the impossible occur.
  3. A good strategy builds on the experiences of people. It uses their skills to the best advantage. It stays with their experience so their values fit in with what they need to do to be part of the strategy.
  4. A good strategy involves people. It takes into account that how we get there is as important as the ultimate destination. People learn as much from the process as the content of a campaign.
  5. A good strategy is realistic. It develops out of an analysis of what the membership can and cannot do.
  6. A good strategy includes activities that build spirit, that keep people interested and involved along the way.
  7. A good strategy has depth. It includes not only good ideas but steps to carry out those ideas.

**STRUCTURES** People come and go in organizations. They take on new responsibilities, they withdraw, their priorities change. A strategy should be able to survive independently of the individuals who first planned it.

The strategy should be written down somewhere. The strategy

should also be carried out within a structure so that responsibilities are clearly delineated and actions and decisions are seen to be legitimate.

How much structure? The more people who are involved in the implementation of the strategy, the more we need to communicate through a structure. Information must flow in a predictable, consistent and dependable fashion. At the same time, our interaction should not be so structured that members do not feel part of the decision-making process. Experience shows that people are more willing to work for strategies they feel they participated in creating.

## **STRATEGIES AND TACTICS**

Strategies and tactics are not the same thing. The strategy is the overall plan for getting where we want to go. Tactics are the specific thing we do to help us get there: demonstration, picket lines, petitions, mass letter writing, etc. Tactics are important because they move the issue along and build the organization.

## **TIME LINES**

A time line is a plan of action that ties the specific steps to when they need to happen. Some things need to happen before other things can occur, like choosing a meeting place before advertising a meeting. Having a time line worked out in advance helps us coordinate our activities and decisions, reminds us of deadlines, and helps us see if we are making the progress we need.

Time lines can also maintain commitment by drawing attention to “dead spots”, those periods between events, or while we wait for a court decision, or immediately following a minor success when members get restless, wonder what is going on and lose interest. When it comes time to bring them together again, it may be hard to do. A time line lets us know if our plan contains long gaps between activities so we can go back and create something interesting to keep people involved.

## **EVALUATION**

Are we making progress? Are our original assumptions still relevant? Have the facts changed? Do our ideas work? Have we been sidetracked?

Strategies do not always unfold according to plan. Sometimes we just need an opportunity to rejuvenate and remind ourselves of the bigger picture. Sometimes we are making mistakes and need to give ourselves a chance to learn from them. There are many good reasons to build check points into our strategy, points at which we assess our strategy and make changes if necessary.

**KNOW WHAT YOU WANT** An issue must be clearly defined before you can successfully gather relevant information on it.

Narrow the focus so you are getting information you can use, not just information on the topic.

**BE ORGANIZED** Start a file on the issue. Organize and file all the relevant information you have gathered from various sources on the topic. In a relatively short period of time, this should be a good, handy sources of information.

**WHERE TO LOOK FOR INFORMATION** **The Members Come First**  
Members of your group should be the best source of information of changes occurring in their specific areas since they confront it every day.

Sometimes it is necessary to get members together from various areas to talk about what is going on in order to get a more complete picture.

As members get together to begin to talk about changes which are occurring in their areas, they may come to see a specific problem not as an isolated, single case but part of an overall coordinated strategy being phased in by the opposition.

Once the members are aware of the significance of some changes in their area, they might talk about it more to their associates and over time should be able to feed back more information to the group.

### **Corporate Research**

The basic rule of thumb is to “dig” for information from any source you can think of.

Often you may discover that a seemingly small employer is actually part of a large corporate network and is far from broke. They are simply using that excuse to refuse your demands.

Corporate research can sometimes reveal connections between some public officials and business people through such things as being on a company’s board of directors, being a major shareholder in the company, or maybe even being related an influential person in the company. It also can be useful in organizing and in educating members, as well as for identifying people in the same company in different locations with common problems.

# HOW TO WRITE AND PRESENT A BRIEF

## PURPOSE OF BRIEF

- I. To criticize existing conditions.
- II. To suggest steps to remedy a situation.
- III. To initiate a project.
- IV. To inform and persuade.

## INITIAL PLANNING WITHIN YOUR GROUP

1. Consider all ideas that may arise from the group.
2. Select the basic ideas, generally not more than four. If you have too many, confusion will result.
3. Select two or three people (no more) to research and write the brief.
4. Decide who will present the brief. Select a speaker with a well-modulated voice that will carry. No personalities should be involved here.
5. Decide who will receive your brief. This will determine your language and your approach i.e., scientific, philosophic, factual etc.
6. Decide tactics -- personal presentation, need for specialists, how many will accompany the speaker, etc.
  - a) For a private presentation -- two or three people; and
  - b) Public presentation -- the more the better. This will indicate strong support for your position.

## WRITING THE BRIEF

Remember two important rules when writing up your case:

1. Be clear; and
2. Concise.

The following are some simple guidelines on how to ensure what you have written is easily understood and the major points are clear:

1. Collect all available material and information.
2. Discuss form and length of the brief. Keep it short, it should not be a doctoral dissertation.
3. Include all the factual material necessary. Use easily understood words, good, concise sentence structure, no phrases, no flowery adjectives.
4. Make statistics understandable. Round off the decimals.

## STRUCTURE

1. Have the brief accurately typewritten. If you are including diagrams, plans or maps, be sure they are drawn to scale.

## HOW TO WRITE AND PRESENT A BRIEF

### E AND FORM

2. Prepare a realistic budget, do not pad. If your audience is knowledgeable, you will lose credibility with inaccuracies.
3. Form:
  - a) Organize your thoughts first. Sit down and think about what you want to say before you start to write;
  - b) Draw up an outline. Jot down, in point form, the major points you want conveyed. Make sure they logically follow each other, it is like building up a case or constructing an argument;
  - c) Do not be afraid to change things such as the order or the way a point is made;
  - d) Start with an introduction. This should provide a brief summary of the major points to be made in the document;
  - e) Break up the body of the document with section headings or sub-heads for each major point or topic addressed;
  - f) End with a conclusion. This should sum up the major arguments made in the document;
  - g) Possibly include a summary of recommendations if the document is long and a large number of recommendations were made throughout it. This summary should be included at the end;
  - h) Should also include bibliography, footnote statistics and direct quotes; and
  - i) Approval of brief, the group that you represent must approve the brief, otherwise it carries no weight.

### PRESENTATION DAY

1. Be on time for your appointment or the public hearings.
2. Dress in an appropriate manner. This is not the time to make a statement by wearing unusual clothing. You will only distract your listener(s) from what you are saying.
3. Have copies of your brief to leave with your listener(s). Leave any necessary background material with them.
4. Introduce the members of your group, or explain who and how many you represent.
5. Compliment the listener(s) on taking steps to remedy a situation, even if it is only by listening to you.
6. Deliver your brief with assurance and confidence in the importance of your message, you must be “sold” to “sell” someone else.

## HOW TO WRITE AND PRESENT A BRIEF

7. Be prepared to answer questions that may arise, have consultants available if necessary.

### **AFTER THE PRESENTATION**

1. Arrange the follow-up meetings.
2. Ask for a report on actions taken.
3. Offer assistance in research.
4. Keep in touch by letter or telephone. Do not let your brief be “filed”.
5. Report to your group.

### **NOTES ON LONGER BRIEFS**

When writing up your case, it is essential that you make it easy for the reader to quickly grasp your major points. This is most important for long documents. A brief presented to a local or provincial government committee may not be read cover to cover, except by a few committed individuals. Many committee members, confronted with a long brief or large number of briefs often read only the introduction, conclusion and a summary of recommendations if the latter is included. The body of the document may only be skimmed. Therefore, ensure that the major points are made in the introduction and conclusion.

Another feature that helps to draw the reader’s attention is to provide a Table of Contents listing section headings. At a glance, this gives readers a good idea of what is covered in the document. If they do not have time to read the whole document, they may flip to a particular section which interests them and read it thoroughly.

Do not be discouraged from writing thorough, well-substantiated documents by the possibility that some of the people they are being presented to may not read them word for word. It is often more important to write documents primarily for the members of your organization, to provide them with the back ground information and arguments pertaining to the issue(s) in dispute at the time.

## HOW TO FORM A COALITION

**WHAT IS A COALITION?** A coalition is simply several groups working together for a particular cause. Each individual group may have very different goals, structures and values but, as a coalition, they all share a common interest in a single issue or in achieving a particular goal. Groups may contribute to coalition efforts in various ways, in the form of people, funds, services, information, endorsements or contacts.

**WHY FORM A COALITION?** One individual or group, working alone, will be less effective than several groups working together. The more groups that support an issue from a variety of perspectives, the greater their power. An employer, a legislator or the media might ignore an issue supported by an individual or a single group. But that same issue might merit new interest if it is supported by a broad-based coalition.

Coalitions bring long-term rewards. If you build a successful coalition around your issue, it will be easier to gain support from some of the same groups on other issues of importance to you.

**HOW DO YOU FORM A COALITION?** Building a coalition requires planning. The first step is to outline what you want the coalition to accomplish and how member organizations might contribute to that end.

1. **Determine what type of relationship you want to develop with other organizations. Some options are:**

a) **Endorsement.** You may want to use other groups' names, with their permission, to endorse a fund-raiser, a particular project like a particular study, or to support a piece of legislation. Such endorsements can help persuade reluctant administrators, legislators or even potential supporters.

b) **Short-Term Alliance.** You could band together to achieve a specific short-term goal. This means that you must clearly define that goal, the tactics, timelines and strategies to be used, and the role each organization will play in achieving it.

c) **Informal Coalition.** This is an ongoing coalition with broad goals, such as educating the public on your group's goals or keeping the issue on the agenda of your legislature. There is no formal structure and no new organization is formed. Member organizations assign and undertake specific tasks to support the goals of the coalition.

d) **Formal Coalition.** A formal coalition actually creates a new organization with a formal structure. The coalition acts and speaks for its member organizations. Groups contribute pre-

## HOW TO FORM A COALITION

determined funds or services. Some might donate financial resources, while others provide volunteers or in-kind services such as printing, postage or computer services.

### **2. Gather preliminary information about the type of groups you can approach for support:**

- a) Look for a broad base of support among groups that represent the diversity of your community. Include in your target list similar groups, civil rights organizations, church groups, labour unions and professional associations.
- b) Identify which members of your organization are also members of, or have friends in, the groups that you want to contact.

### **3. Review your target list of organizations and determine how best to approach them:**

- a) Look at each organization listed. What would motivate it to join your particular coalition? Where do its goals overlap with the coalition's goals? Are there potential points of conflict? What would this prospective member gain from and bring to the coalition? What is its organizational structure? Who makes decisions? Who is the best person to approach? Who is the best person to do the approaching?
- b) Draft an introductory letter that outlines the purposes and proposed structure of the coalition and invites each organization to join. Mention that you will call to set up a meeting. The basic letter can be modified and signed by different people, as appropriate to the organization addressed.
- c) Within a week after mailing the letter, phone to see if the organization is interested. If so, arrange to meet with a decision-making representative of the organization. If appropriate, include in this meeting a member of your organization who has links with the prospective coalition member.
- d) During the meeting, ask for advice, contacts and information. Demonstrate to the prospective member that their organization will have input from the beginning by asking

## HOW TO FORM A COALITION

him/her to serve on the coalition's steering committee.

- e) Encourage each organization to assess realistically what it is willing to contribute to and what it needs from the coalition. Get a clear picture of the organizations self-interests and be honest about your own motivations for forming/joining the coalition. Such clarification can help prevent problems later on.
- f) Keep in touch after the meeting. Exchange newsletters, flyers and other pertinent information. Clarify the organization's relationship to the coalition. They might send you a letter accepting the invitation to join, or you could send a letter officially welcoming the organization to the coalition.
- g) Arrange a meeting of representatives from all the groups you have contacted. Discuss the purpose and goals of the coalition. Agree upon how decisions will be made. Establish and assign specific tasks. Who will speak publicly on behalf of the group? Who will handle fundraising? Identify other organizations to involve in the effort. Make plans to contact them and set a schedule for future coalition meetings.

### **COALITION GROWTH AND SUSTENANCE**

Like all relationships, coalitions need maintenance work. Here are a few tips on how to keep things running smoothly:

1. Encourage coalition members to be flexible and open-minded. Every group need not agree on every point, but it is important to be able to listen to other perspectives and to be willing to compromise.
2. Try to avoid unnecessary conflicts among members by keeping coalition meetings and activities focused on the common goal. Do not let the coalition become a forum for conflicts over other issues.
3. When possible, be supportive of member organizations' activities in other areas. Visible signs that you support each other help build trust and strengthen the coalition.
4. Try to avoid "reinventing the wheel". Always ask what has been tried already and what has not worked before.
5. Be open to expanding coalition membership as your work and the issue evolve. Keep an eye out for new sources of support.
6. Be aware that some organizations may have "competing" or

## HOW TO FORM A COALITION

“secret” agendas, in their own interest, that can complicate coalition efforts. Try to identify these interests early on. Where possible, relate them to the overall coalition goals, using them as a motivating force. If this becomes an obstacle, you may have to discuss the problem privately with the organization in question before it blows up in a coalition meeting or activity.

7. Make sure coalition work is distributed equitably. Try to keep each organization involved to its maximum potential. Be generous with praise. Recognize members’ contributions within the coalition and in external publicity.

## Meeting your MLA

- PURPOSES**
- ◆ To establish personal contact with your MLA.
  - ◆ To give the MLA background information and express your views.
  - ◆ To give the MLAs a chance to explain their views.

**RESOURCES PEOPLE**

Between two and four nurses is desirable. The local/worksite president and executive are obvious choices but this is also an ideal project for members of your local/worksite Political Action Committee.

**TIME**

The meeting itself should not last more than an hour, unless the MLA indicates that a longer meeting is desired. Planning should only take an hour or two.

**MONEY**

The sole expense may be a meal for those involved, or transportation costs in rural areas.

**ACTION PRELIMINARIES  
CHECKLIST**

- ◆ Decide which issue(s) you wish to discuss with your MLA.
- ◆ If there is more than one issue, prepare an agenda and forward a copy to your MLA. Allow him/her to add to it.
- ◆ Make an appointment either by phone or letter. Request a particular date and time, but indicate some flexibility.
- ◆ Plan your discussion in advance. If several of you are meeting, decide who will speak on which issues, or aspects of the issue. Research the topic as deeply as possible, and anticipate MLAs responses.
- ◆ Research the MLA. (Check Hansard if possible, and local newspaper files, if time permits.) Try to have something positive to say about the MLAs record. Try to find a way of relating your request to their previous behavior or statements.
- ◆ Assess the practicality of regional meetings involving several MLAs and local/worksites.

# HOW TO TALK TO A POLITICIAN

## DOING IT

- ◆ Be on time, and don't prolong the meeting unless the MLA indicates a desire to discuss the matter longer than the allotted time. Be aware, however, that a short, well-prepared and presented production is more impressive and effective than a longer, rambling one that eventually dissipates into general conversation.
- ◆ Take charge. *You* asked for the meeting; *you* know what needs to be discussed; and *you* know what results should be forthcoming from the visit.
- ◆ Give the MLA a chance to talk, and do not resort to ridicule if he or she is ignorant. MLAs cover a lot of fields, it is up to *you* to educate them. Treat all questions calmly and seriously.
- ◆ Do not allow the MLA to dominate the conversation. A tactic that politicians use (either consciously or unconsciously) is to talk at great length in generalities. Often this is repetitive and irrelevant verbiage. If necessary, interrupt and redirect the discussion.
- ◆ *Never* threaten MLAs with the loss of their seats. You can't follow through.
- ◆ If you did not send the MLA advance material, leave a summary of your views when you go.

## FOLLOW-UP

- ◆ Send the MLA a letter of thanks for the chance to talk, and offer to meet again in the future or provide any information which may be needed.
- ◆ Don't let contact with the MLA die after one meeting. Try to establish regular informal meetings or telephone conversations.
- ◆ Report your meeting to the Communications Officer at the MNU Office.

## KEYPOINTS

- ◆ Research the issues and the MLA.
- ◆ Get the information MLAs do not possess.
- ◆ Do not alienate the MLA, or you have taken a step backwards.

## Advice for dealing with politicians

## HOW TO TALK TO A POLITICIAN

1. Get to know the legislators -- all of them. Get to know them under positive circumstances if at all possible (i.e., lunch to describe the history and work of the Manitoba Nurses' Union). Too many legislators meet too many people for the first time who have to have something, have to have it now, and whose actions or words are influenced by urgent need, or even by desperation. Every legislator is human, with corresponding strengths and weaknesses. In a problem you will get better results if you treat politicians as human, and if you have some prior idea of their strengths and weaknesses before you start. Politicians get a lot of criticism -- which is fair ball. But, valid criticism is sometimes discounted because the source, i.e., "the media," is known to the politician only for criticism. So, criticize when necessary in a calm, cool, collected fashion. But as well, when it is appropriate, make sure that the politician knows and remembers you for a word of advice, congratulations or appreciation.
2. Get to know the public servants who are the "officers" on the "firing line." The fact is that much policy is initiated by young, aggressive, upwardly mobile, or by older, defensive, status quo oriented public servants responsible for day-to-day operations. To some extent, everyone's pet project is in their hands. Advice contained above regarding legislators applies equally to public servants.
3. Learn, from both the politicians and the public servants, how their respective environmental systems operate. Discover other input points, and pressure points. Discover how long the process takes. Find out who else is plugged in, how and why.
4. Keep in touch, personally and with reports. For one thing, this maintains a kind of distant, early warning system, that is more effective the more you are in the mind of politicians. Be present. Be around. When politicians know you and know they will face you at the moment of decision, or soon after, the odds get better for you.
5. Don't just talk (or write) -- show. Show the number of voters affected. Illustrate the problem at the grass roots.
6. Involve the politician in your plans. There is almost always one politician who will offer strategic, or tactical advice on how much to try for and how. If he's involved in developing the game plan -- if it has some of him in it -- he'll be a more dedicated supporter, in caucus or in a department.
7. Know your rights, and stick by them.
8. Form alliances.

## HOW TO TALK TO A POLITICIAN

9. Document everything. Keep copies of all correspondence. Keep detailed memos of telephone calls and personal meetings. Send detailed confirming letters.
10. Don't bluff. Don't threaten publicity, legal action or anything else, unless you are ready, willing and able to follow through.
11. Get the facts and get them straight. Some information is at present beyond your reach, but as much as humanly possible, avoid errors of fact. Nothing can more quickly deviate a debate away from the merits of a case than charges of sloppy research, factual errors (or distortions) or "deviousness".
12. Be confident and act confidently.
13. The public, individually and in groups, have a paramount right to participate fully in the political process. Their right is not lessened by their self-interest. The politicians have no proprietary hold on the political process, although out of ignorance and self-interest they foster the myth that they do. As contributors to the debate on public policy, the public service must be recognized as an interest group with no more right and no less right than any other interest group to provide input. None of this is easy, or fast, or automatic. None of it has any end. With each new issue, with each new batch of politicians, with each new opposing interest group, the process must be begun again. The process of politics is truly a life process for us all. It is like breath. It is universal. It is vital. It is lifelong. It should come naturally to us all.

## M.N.U. POLICY RE: POLITICAL ACTION

### **CIVIC RIGHTS OF NURSES**

The MNU Advocates:

1. That the Union oppose any infringement of the civic Rights of its members including the right to hold public office.
2. That nurses have the right to sit on the Board of any health care facility whether or not they are employed by said health facility.
3. The Civic Rights of nurses as citizens and caregivers to communicate with, and be heard by, health facility boards.

### **POLITICAL ACTION -- POLICY**

1. It is the right and duty of every nurse to participate in the political process.
2. It is the right of nurses to be active in the political party of their choice and to seek and hold public office.
3. Local/worksites have the responsibility to promote health care issues consistent with M.N.U. Policy.
4. The Union has a professional and social responsibility to initiate and promote non-partisan political activity in support of health care policies and practices.
5. The Union shall maintain it's independence from any political party.
6. Prior to any provincial election, the Union shall make its members aware of the health care policies of the political parties of Manitoba.
7. The Union shall attempt to maintain at least annual liaison meetings with all political parties.