

# Understanding Your Member of Congress

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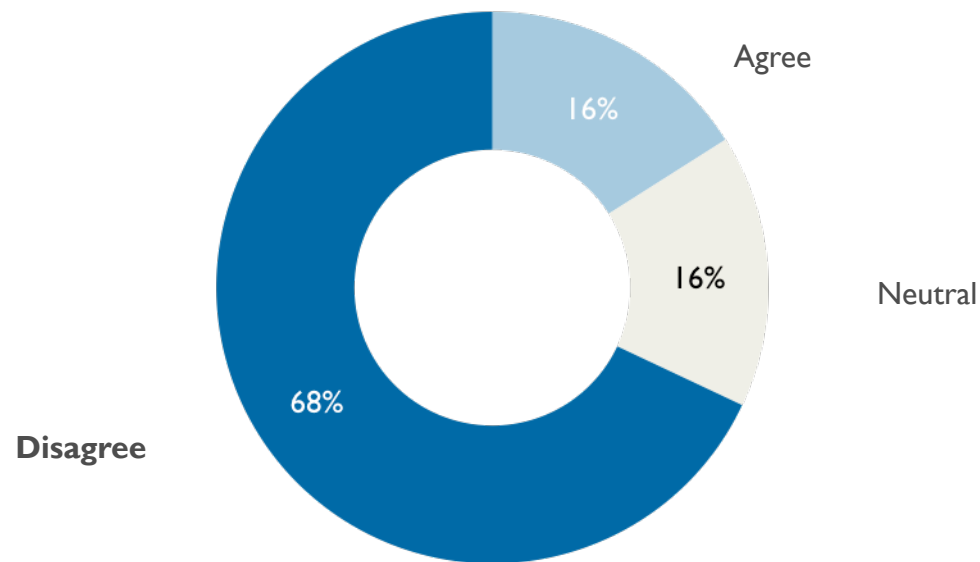
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# Members Feel Misunderstood by Constituents

**Member Response to the Statement: “Most of my constituents understand the day-to-day activities I engage in.”**



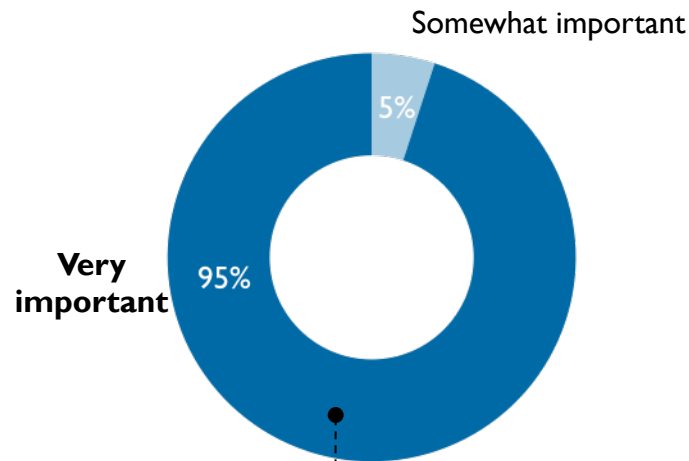
## Analysis

- Many Americans possess a limited, and somewhat distorted, view of what it's like to be a Member of Congress; most portrayals of Members by the entertainment industry reinforce the stereotype that they are lazy, self-interested, and corrupt
- Members themselves add to the criticism by decrying their colleagues and Congress, claiming that nothing is getting done
- Reality is somewhat different: For most Members, the job of being a lawmaker is not luxurious or carefree; it's rather chaotic, more like being the CEO of a small start-up company or an emergency room physician

# Constituent Service Work Important to Members

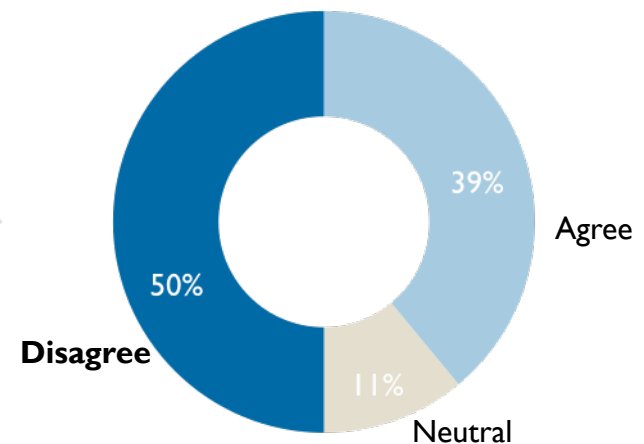
## *But Members May Lack Resources to Meet Demands*

Importance to Members' job satisfaction of staying in touch with constituents



However...

Member response to the statement: "I have the time and resources I need to accomplish my goals in Congress."



“Our government doesn’t work without constituent conversations and feedback. Knowing the issues important to constituents, and knowing what they think Washington needs to do, is the only way I can succeed at my job.”

- 5<sup>th</sup> Term House Member

### Analysis

- Members prioritize serving and staying in touch with constituents; constituent conversations guide policymaking, and every Member realizes that reelection hinges on their ability to serve the constituents who vote them into office
- Nonetheless, Members face constraints in their ability to meet constituent demands, and advocates should be sensitive to Members' limited time and resources when making specific asks of their Member of Congress

# Schedules Leave Little Time for Focusing on Constituents

## Sample House Member Schedule\*

Scheduled events often overlap	<b>9:30 AM – 9:30 AM</b>	Speak to attendees of National Women, Infants, and Children's Association (WIC) Leadership Conference
	<b>10:00 AM – 12:00 PM</b>	Attend appropriations hearing for FDA regulatory programs
	<b>10:30 AM – 12:00 PM</b>	Attend bipartisan classified briefing on Iran
Members may be late to meetings due to competing constituent demands for Member time	<b>12:00 PM – 1:00 PM</b>	Attend caucus meeting on jobs and the economy
	<b>12:45 PM – 1:15 PM</b>	Meet with WIC program manager to discuss issues and funding
	<b>1:15 PM – 1:45 PM</b>	Meet with representatives from the American Israel Public Affairs Committee to discuss U.S.-Israel aid
	<b>1:30 PM – 2:00 PM</b>	Meet with local county supervisor to discuss national parks bill
	<b>2:00 PM – 2:30 PM</b>	Meet with nonprofit representative to discuss food stamp initiative in state
	<b>2:30 PM – 3:00 PM</b>	Meet with local U.S.Army officers to discuss land transfer issues
	<b>3:00 PM – 4:00 PM</b>	Listen in on fundraising call at party HQ
	<b>3:00 PM – 3:30 PM</b>	(FYI: regional Army Corp of Engineers discussing current projects)
	<b>3:30 PM – 4:00 PM</b>	Meet with organic farming research foundation to discuss farming programs
	<b>4:30 PM – 5:00 PM</b>	Meet with local supervisor to discuss health issues
	<b>5:00 PM – 6:00 PM</b>	Meet with local county representatives to discuss flood control efforts
	<b>6:30 PM – 9:30 PM</b>	(FYI: American Council for Capital Formation Dinner Discussion)

## Analysis

- Because Members must pivot from one obligation to another with very little time between meetings, they may not be fully prepared to discuss an advocate's issue in meetings; this is more often a function of the Members' schedules and not ambivalence to their constituents
- Member schedules vary depending on the fluctuating congressional schedule and on current events; as a result, Members may need to cut meetings short in order to keep pace with their changing daily agenda

\*From one day in a House Member's Washington, D.C., office in March 2012. Only identifying details have been altered.

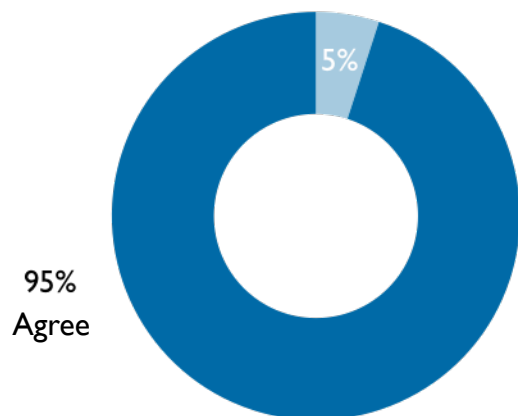
Source: Congressional Management Foundation and the Society for Human Resource Management, "Life in Congress: The Member Perspective," 2013.

# Members Trust Staff to Help Them Serve Constituents

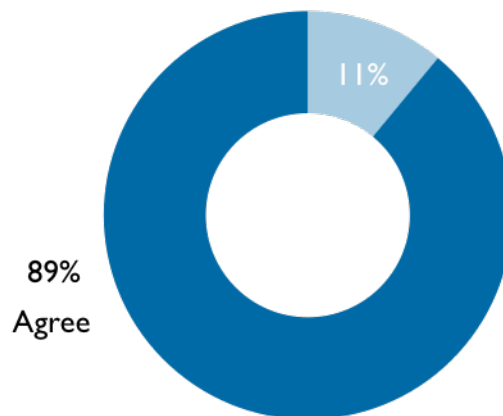
## Member Opinions About Their Work in Congress

■ Agree ■ Neutral

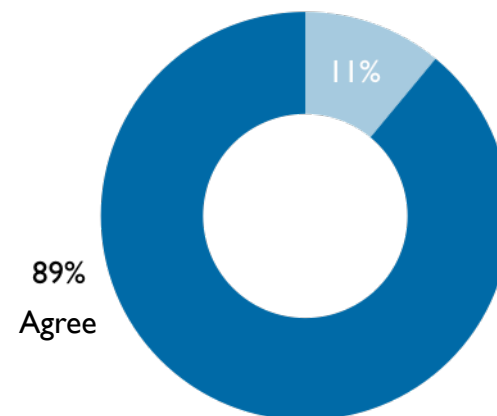
**My staff clearly understands and is motivated by what I'm trying to accomplish**



**My staff is good at keeping focused on my goals and priorities**



**My staff provides sufficient support to help me effectively do my job**



### Analysis

- To help them keep up with their many professional obligations, Members depend on staff, who support them with their day-to-day work and keep them focused on legislative goals
- Members trust their staff to help them carry out their responsibilities in office, to include listening to constituents; for this reason, advocates should not be surprised if they meet with staff in lieu of a Member