

CONGRESSIONAL CALENDAR & TIME FRAME FOR ACTION

ADVOCATING YEAR-ROUND

Advocacy at the national level by a professional group such as AAPM can be a full-time business. Holding a Congressional “Visits Day” once a year can be a very significant building block in an advocacy program, but it is just one block and must be viewed in context with other actions. As many ‘visits days’ occur well into a given legislative year, it is useful to understand how they fit in the likely Congressional calendar for the year, and what some other likely points of intervention in the legislative process might exist.

Legislative advocacy is also a long-term business, where a “Visits Day” one year helps you build the long-term relationships with legislators and staff that need to be nurtured over time. The “payoff” from a sustained legislative advocacy effort is often down the road, and not infrequently on issues not anticipated at the time of a first visit. AAPM urges its politically active members to develop long-term relationships with their House and Senate offices. Semi-regular phone calls and email notes to key staffers 2-4 times a year, as long as there is something new to discuss or relate (they are very busy), go a long way to helping ensure Congressional staff see AAPM members as key contacts and useful resources in their work.

TIMELINE FOR ACTIONS IN THE AVERAGE LEGISLATIVE YEAR

The following highlights the semi-formal structure of the average legislative year and provides an estimate of a typical Congressional calendar. The actual Congressional calendar is announced by the leadership at the beginning of the year, but is a fluid document that changes throughout the year. This timeline is meant to provide AAPM leadership and members with a general timeframe that puts the advocacy program in context.

Note: ‘recesses’ are periods when formal Congressional business is closed so legislators can get back to their districts or go on fact-finding trips. Except for the long August break and closing down at the end of the year, these are usually 1-week long. Recesses are a good time to arrange meetings or events back in the district/state with legislators or staff.

January

Congress: The Executive Branch tries to set the agenda for the year through the President’s “State of the Union” address and completion of the President’s budget for the fiscal year beginning in October. While the budget is formally sent to the Hill in early February, parts are often “leaked” in January to start the debate. Congress generally starts each formal one-year “Session” of each two year “Congress” in late January. After election years, such as this year, Congress is consumed with “organizing” the new Congress: electing the leadership, making Committee appointments and organizing the Subcommittees. Party leadership often uses this time to try to lay out an agenda of its own, with the President’s party introducing or previewing bills to implement the President’s agenda, and the other party setting out alternatives on the major issues.

AAPM: AAPM will use this and other early months of 2007 to finalize and prioritize its legislative agenda. Most priorities will be AAPM-initiated, but there may be things in the President's agenda or early bills introduced to which AAPM will need to react.

February - March

Congress: Once the President's budget has been released, each Congressional chamber will use that as a starting point for developing their own "Budget Resolutions"—semi-binding spending blueprints that theoretically guide and restrict the work of the Appropriations Committees. The leaderships of each party in each chamber try to use this process to articulate and advance their priorities just as the President is pushing for his budget priorities.

Recess: There is always a week-long February recess for President's Day (3rd week). Occasionally, there is a week-long mid-March recess as well.

AAPM: As the annual debate over NIH funding priorities takes shape in this period, AAPM will need to know by late February or early March where NIH funding (and other appropriations requests) fits among its legislative agenda items. If NIH funding (e.g. the Pain Consortium) is a priority, a May visit is really too late to start the dialogue with legislators, although not too late to bring grass roots support to a specific funding request. This is also the time period during which pain-specific bills will likely be introduced.

April - May

Congress: These are heavy months for hearings in Congressional Committees generally, and the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees particularly. Floor activity is difficult to predict, but is not likely to include pain-specific items.

Recess: Usually, a two week Easter/April recess and one week for Memorial Day (end of May).

AAPM: May (really February through May) is a time when many organizations arrange for their leaders and memberships to visit Capitol Hill to meet with legislators or staff and urge them to support specific requests (through votes, cosponsoring bills, letters, speeches, hearings, etc.). Congressional visits should be followed-up with letters, phone calls and emails from both an organization's staff/representatives and those members who participated in Congressional meetings. Follow-up to obtain final answers, say "thank you," and continue to develop relationships with key staffers is an integral part of any "visits" program. It sets the stage for future grass roots communications on issues of importance to AAPM members and the pain community.

June - July

Congress: In late June and July the Appropriations bills dominate much of the agenda in each chamber, though other legislative issues can be addressed as well. Due to constitutional requirements and congressional rules, the Senate takes formal action on tax and appropriations bills only after the House has acted. On other issues, hearings and Committee "mark-ups" may proceed in one chamber, the other, or both, with no particular order. Often if one house has acted in a recent Session on a large topic (e.g. NIH reauthorization) that chamber will wait for the other to show interest before returning to the topic.

Recess: There will be a 1-week recess for the 4th of July.

AAPM: If appropriate, AAPM could issue letters applauding a milestone on a request (introduction of a bill, a hearing, a mark-up, passage etc.) The AAPM leadership might be called upon to re-new a request or give “thanks” or even meet with a Senator or House Member when they are back in the district/state.

August - September

Congress: The Congressional ‘August Recess’ will dominate this period. This is when Congressmen and Senators take personal vacations, hit their State fairs, arrange town hall tours of their states, and go on fact-finding trips. Though many staff are on vacation during this period, it is also a time when senior and committee staff are preparing for the final legislative push for the year. Due to the August recess and the various religious and federal holidays in September, September is a very unpredictable period. Sometimes it is a “whirlwind” of legislative activity to move appropriations items before the beginning of the new federal fiscal year, or to get work done before an October recess. Because 2007 is not an election year, much of this may slip into October or beyond.

Recess: usually 4-5 weeks covering most of August with a return the Tuesday after Labor Day.

AAPM: The August recess provides an opportunity for AAPM leadership to arrange personal meetings or hit fundraisers for targeted legislators back in their States. What leaders and staff/representatives need to be doing in DC will depend on what if anything is likely to be moving in September or October. September can be a time of opportunity when some minor legislative priority that might not go on its own gets attached to something larger and unrelated that is likely to move before year-end.

October - December

Congress: This is when the bulk of the year’s work, and particularly the “must pass” items like appropriations bills or continuing spending resolutions, reach the finish line. Because 2007 is not the end of a Congress, but of just the First Session, most legislative work simply carries over to the following year without final action.

Recess: As a non-election year, 2007 will likely see a 1 week recess in early October, then another week for Thanksgiving if Congress has not finished its work by the early October adjournment deadline.

AAPM: Opportunities to achieve results start declining very quickly, so this is more a time for monitoring than action. This is also a period when AAPM takes stock of the past year and gets organized for the following Session.