



# **Inside Oversight: Levin Center at Wayne Law Tutorials**

## **SERIES 3 HOLDING A HEARING**

### **Tutorial: Encouraging Media Coverage During and After a Hearing**

In this video, a Levin Center expert offers tips on how to encourage good media coverage of an oversight hearing during and after the hearing takes place.

#### **Instructor**

Kathy Gest, press secretary to former U.S. Senator William S. Cohen, former chair and ranking Republican member of the Governmental Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management

#### **Transcript**

Kathy: Hello, I'm Kathy Gest, and I'm going to talk to you today about how to get good media attention for oversight hearings, and why that's important. I spent a decade working in the U.S. Senate as the press secretary for Senator Bill Cohen of Maine who at different times served as chairman or ranking Republican member of the Governmental Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management.

An earlier tutorial talked about preparations to make before a hearing to increase your chances of getting good media attention. In this session, I'm going to focus on what to do on the day of the hearing and afterwards as you work to keep the media engaged. Here are some tips.

**Provide good media facilities in the hearing room**

Tip Number One: Provide good facilities for the media. There should be a press table and chairs for print reporters where they can set up their computers and get copies of hearing materials. Make sure the area has access to electrical outlets in case reporters need to plug in.

For the broadcast media, which use cameras and tripods, make sure they have a place to set up with good line of sight to the witnesses and lawmakers at the hearing. It's best to designate an area for cameras that has enough room for the personnel to both stand while they are filming and sit while they are waiting. The space also should have electrical outlets and so-called "mult boxes" where they can plug into the hearing room's sound system. For radio reporters, a table, with chairs, should be designated where they can place tape recorders, plug in, and access the mult box.

Sometimes hearings generate a lot of interest from photographers. If there are just a few, they usually can move around quietly to take pictures from different angles. But if there are a lot of them, it may be necessary to designate an area in front of the dais where they need to stay so as not to disrupt the proceedings.

**Ensure materials are easily accessible**

Tip Number Two: Ensure materials are available in the hearing room and online. Prepare a second press release for distribution at or after the hearing. It should highlight what the chair said in the opening statement, what the witnesses said in their prepared statements, and relevant background on the issue.

Also available to journalists should be the full statements of any lawmakers that have prepared them, the witnesses' statements, and any graphics or other materials being used to illustrate the problem. They should also have copies of studies or supporting documentation that will be referred to during the hearing.

Copies should be on the press tables so they are easily accessible to journalists. But since many hearings are now live streamed and covered by people who aren't in the room, all of the materials should also be available electronically on your website and through social media.

**Encourage interviews with principals from the hearing**

Tip Number Three: Arrange interviews. Since one goal of the hearing is to call attention to the subject matter, usually for a wide audience, it's beneficial to

arrange media interviews after the hearing for the principals. These could include the chairman or other lawmakers, or any or all of the witnesses.

It would be helpful to prepare the interviewees in advance. In an interview, they will often need to present their information in a more succinct fashion than they did at the hearing, so it would be wise to discuss with them in advance what they are going to say to ensure they get in all of their most important points.

### **Follow up with the press**

Tip Number Four: Follow up with your press list. Many people on your list won't be at the hearing so it's advisable to send information to them immediately after the hearing is over. Usually just the new press release will be enough. If you send them too much information they won't read it. But you should state clearly in the release what other information is available and direct them to the website where they can find it. You should also make clear who to call or email if they have specific questions. Similarly, post this information on your Facebook page and Tweet it out.

### **Check the clips**

Tip Number Five: Track the hearing coverage right after the hearing and over time. By collecting coverage you will be able to:

- Know what people are saying for good or ill. Good stories can be redistributed – sent to supporters, posted on websites, distributed through social media, and otherwise used to push forward whatever changes you may be seeking to fix problems highlighted at the hearing. If the coverage is negative, it will give you a good reading on where your problems lie and what avenues to pursue to achieve the result you're looking for.
- See whether the media are reporting your issue accurately. If your issue and stance are being misrepresented, you will need to take action to correct that problem. You can make a direct approach to the news organization that you believe is misrepresenting the issue by going directly to a reporter or consider talking with editors or other higher ups. Another option is to issue and distribute widely new information that contradicts the erroneous reporting. You can also reach out to key journalists through group briefings and/or one-on-one interviews.

### **Keep the issue in the news**

Tip Number Six: Work to keep the issue in the news. If you're seeking action through legislative or administrative changes, it's important to keep the issue in the minds of those who need to act. Continuing media coverage can help do that. It can give momentum and add pressure.

Coverage can be generated by arranging interviews from time to time with key figures. They might be supportive lawmakers, experts on the subject matter, or people who are affected by the failure to act.

As the fix progresses through the system, that can be treated as news and generate more coverage. If the action is legislative, put out a press release at each stage – introduction of a bill, committee hearing, committee vote, floor action, etc. And, of course, declare victory when the legislation is finally passed.

I hope these tips will help you get good media coverage during your hearing and in the days afterwards.

### **Good Media Coverage During and After a Hearing**

- 1. Provide good media facilities in the hearing room.**
- 2. Ensure materials are available in person and online.**
- 3. Arrange interviews.**
- 4. Follow up with the press list.**
- 5. Track the press clips.**
- 6. Keep the issue in the news.**

Kathy: Thank you for watching.

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