

The ARRL Legislative Action Program Needs You!

The ARRL Legislative Action Committee
Jim Weaver, K8JE, Chairman

You say you don't want to become involved in politics? You may not know it, but you already are...and you really have no choice. Politics is the way we live with each other. Call it advocacy or interpersonal relations or whatever you wish; we as a people are political in nature. It is politics that children often use to get mom or dad to buy them an ice cream cone or candy. Husbands and wives use politics all the time to get along with each other. We hams use politics when we want our neighbors to feel good about our installing an antenna or when we work with them to solve a case of radio frequency interference. We use politics to get a building permit for a new tower.

Politics is all around us, even if we choose to live the life of a would-be hermit as Henry David Thoreau did on the shore of Walden Pond in Massachusetts. We cannot escape it. If we cannot escape being involved in politics, it would seem wise for us to learn how to use it to our legitimate advantage. This, after all, is the reason we humans developed politics.

Let's clear one thing up at the very start. We *are not* talking about partisan (political party vs political party, candidate vs candidate) politics. We *are* talking about non-partisan politics — the kind that is limited to working toward getting our form of ice cream or candy. Better still, we are talking about doing things that gain acceptance of an idea...of a proposition...of an action.

In the case of ARRL, we are talking about using lobbying or advocacy to promote the

Before current hams were around, ARRL was lobbying to protect Amateur Radio. The new LAP needs your help to defend and promote Amateur Radio.

existence of Amateur Radio and to encourage and enhance our great radio service.

Hiram Did It!

ARRL has been lobbying for Amateur Radio at least since the days following World War I. It was then that the Navy Department had control over all wireless communication in the US. The top brass didn't want a bunch of amateurs — or anyone else — cluttering up the airwaves with their spark gap signals.

OM Hiram Percy Maxim, W1AW him-

self, went to Washington to get us back on the air. He accomplished this thanks to the personal lobbying he and a few of his friends did on Capitol Hill.

Amateur Radio was allowed back on the air thanks to Hiram...and his lobbying. Obviously, lobbying is not a four-letter word.

Throughout the decades after Hiram got us back on the air, ARRL has had contacts in Washington to help promote the Amateur Radio agenda. First of all, we had an FCC



In a 2001 visit to Capitol Hill, ARRL President (then Vice President) Joel Harrison, W5ZN (left), and then-President Jim Haynie, W5JBP, brought a Senate staffer up to date on the issues important to the Amateur Radio Service.

The ARRL Legislative Action Committee consists of
Jim Weaver, K8JE, Chairman;
Bill Edgar, N3LLR; Frank Fallon,
N2FF; Jim Fenstermaker, K9JF,
and Dr David Woolweaver, K5RAV

that relied fairly heavily on the technical expertise of its staff. As the impact of technical knowledge began to fade with the Commissioners, we had people such as Barry Goldwater (K7UGA, SK) who was the senior senator from Arizona. Barry never failed to lend a hand when Amateur Radio had a legitimate issue with the FCC. Most recently, we've had Representative Mike Ross, WD5DVR, of Arkansas come to the defense of Amateur Radio when it has been unduly attacked. There just aren't enough Goldwaters and Rosses these days to carry the day for us. Someone else is needed to help do the job.

It's Our Turn!

We can rely on the Hiram, Barrys and Mikes to do our work for only so long. It is time for us to take up the battle to defend and to promote Amateur Radio. At least this was the thinking of the ARRL Board of Directors when it established the ARRL Legislative Action Program (LAP) through Minute 18 of the January 2005 Annual Board of Directors Meeting. This Program provides a mechanism through which ARRL members are able to promote and protect Amateur Radio through coordinated, legitimate political action at the Federal government level.

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After months of preparation and planning, this Program is being rolled out. What we need now is ARRL members who will learn what the Program is and how it operates. We need members to volunteer to be "foot soldiers" in our battle on behalf of Amateur Radio.

What type of members are we looking for? This is simple. We are looking for members who can talk with other people, who can show respect to other people, who are team players and can follow the simple guidelines of the ARRL LAP. Most of all, we are looking for members who are interested in helping keep Amateur Radio strong.

What we do not need are people who are lone wolves, who are social outcasts or who are afraid to meet new people.

How the Program Works

The organization of the ARRL Legislative Action Program is simple. It relies on the

"team" concept. The LAP team consists of a Management Team and an Operations Team.

The Management Team

Team Management consists of the ARRL Board of Directors, the ARRL President (Joel Harrison, W5ZN), the ARRL CEO (Dave Sumner, K1ZZ), the Executive Committee (EC) of the Board, the ARRL General Counsel (Chris Imlay, W3KD) and the government relations (lobbying) consultant firm (Chwat & Co, Inc) retained by the League. Here is how they fit into the picture:

- The Board established the Legislative Action Program and determines the legislation we will promote or oppose.
- The ARRL President, CEO, General Counsel and our consultant determine the strategy, tactics and timing to be used.
- The CEO manages the day-to-day operation of the Project under the oversight of the ARRL President.
- The Executive Committee of the Board ensures compliance with the directives of the Board between Board meetings.

The Operations Team

The work of the Management Team is passed to the Operations Team, which puts the plan into action. The operations team typically consists of the Division Director, the Division Legislative Action Chair (DLAC), the Legislative Action Coordinator (LAC) for each state, and the Legislative Action Assistants (LAAs) who visit the offices of Congressmen. These visits are made to Congressmen's offices back home. There is no need to travel to Washington. LAAs discuss the legislative needs of Amateur Radio and ARRL with Congressmen or their aides.

If the Division Director chooses to appoint a DLAC, this appointee manages the operation of the Legislative Action Program in the Division under the guidance of the Director. Similarly, the Division Director may modify the structure of the Program within the Division based upon the needs of the Division. The following discussion is based upon the typical structure.

Activity is Coordinated

Coordination is important to a successful grassroots lobbying program. Generally speaking, the time to generate lobbying contacts is when a bill has just been introduced. This is when co-sponsors are being sought and the support of subcommittee members is being courted. Also, when the letter-writing phase of a lobbying campaign is reached, arranging to have many letters on the same subject reach a Congressman's

office at the same time is much more likely to get attention than if the same number of letters is received over an extended period.

The work of the Legislative Action Program is conducted in a logical, coordinated fashion. This is done to enable us to achieve the greatest amount of good from our effort. Volunteers in the program contact the people they are have agreed to contact when advised to contact them. This avoids the embarrassing and damaging situation of having someone lobby a Congressman on a bill that has not yet been introduced into

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the halls of government, or similarly having someone lobby a member of one branch of Congress on a bill that has not yet been introduced into his branch of Congress. An example would be lobbying a senator to support a bill that is only in the House of Representatives. Not only can the senator do nothing about this bill, but he may not have heard of it. Lobbying him on this bill is a waste of his valuable time and is likely to leave him with an unfavorable impression.

Finally, coordination of the work of the Program makes it possible to inform all appropriate members of the House or the Senate of the legitimate needs of Amateur Radio at nearly the same time. In the absence of coordination, there would be no general piquing of interest in these needs. Discussing these could easily be spread over periods of many months. The all-important strategic focus would be lost from our effort.

Who Coordinates the Teams and Who Make Up the Teams?

The 15 ARRL Division Directors are the team coordinators. These Directors may have appointed special Division Legislative Action Chairs (DLAC) to act for them to develop and manage the LAP in their Divisions and the states in these Divisions; however, the Director retains ultimate responsibility in the Division.

The Director also appoints Legislative Action Coordinators (LAC) for each state in the Division. The LAC is responsible for recruiting and training Legislative Action Assistants (LAA). These are the people who

actually meet with Congressmen or their aides in their district offices back home. LAAs ideally work in teams of two or three members to carry messages about the legislative needs of Amateur Radio to the Congressmen or their aides.

LAAs are the Face of our Legislative Effort

Legislative Action Assistants provide the highly important service of putting a face on our legislative effort. LAAs are registered voters in the District of the Congressman they lobby; therefore, they are constituents of the Congressman they lobby. Their involvement in the lobbying effort transforms this effort from a faceless cause with no human identity into being a living cause that has the special interest of voters back home.

Who Provides the Information?

Information and materials needed in the Legislative Action Program are provided through ARRL Headquarters and the ARRL Web site. The information includes a variety of background information that is available for LAP workers to read and, if they wish, to print out. Most importantly, the Web site holds brief summaries of the information needed by LAAs to discuss the ARRL position on legislation with Congressmen and their aides. Handout materials, commonly referred to as “leave-behinds,” will also be there when these will be helpful.

These materials are found at a special Grassroots area of the Members Only section of www.arrl.org. All members are encouraged to register to use the Members Only area by going to it and registering to use it. There is no charge to use Members Only. The Grassroots site is open only to LAP volunteers.

How Will I Know When to Visit My Congressman?

Instructions to make appointments and to visit local Congressional offices will be sent out by the ARRL CEO through the Director or DLAC and on to the state LAC. The LAC will advise LAAs to make the visit. He will also share information that will be needed to make the visit. Although LAAs will not be expected to arrange a visit “the next day,” they should attempt to schedule it within the time frame given to them.

The Legislative Action Committee has sponsored a video that demonstrates how a visit to a Congressman should generally be conducted. This video can be viewed at Grassroots on the ARRL Web site. In addition, each LAA team is being given a copy of the video *Amateur Radio Today* to leave

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at the Congressional office to introduce the Congressman to Amateur Radio.

What do I do After the Visit?

Information flow in this Program is two-way. During the discussion at the Congressman’s office, LAAs should be on the alert for comments that indicate how the Congressman feels about the legislation being discussed and about Amateur Radio. This information may be very helpful to our Washington, DC team by allowing them to identify specific approaches that can be useful when they meet in the Congressman’s office on Capitol Hill.

A brief form for reporting the results of visits to local Congressional offices is included among the information on the Web in Grassroots. In addition to the basic information that a visit was made, insights into any preconceived positions of the Congressman should be included in these reports and forwarded to Program management soon after the visit has been completed.

Can ARRL Be Involved in Lobbying?

The answer is a clear “yes.” Nonprofit organizations such as the ARRL are permitted by the US Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to advocate or lobby for or against nonpartisan issues of interest to them.

ARRL CEO David Sumner, K1ZZ, said it best in his editorial in the August 2006 *QST* when he wrote: “...to address a common misconception, tax-exempt non-profits are not prohibited from attempting to influence legislation. The ARRL can lobby, and we can encourage individuals (principally our members) to lobby, on behalf of our legislative positions as long as the resources we devote to this purpose are ‘insubstantial.’”¹

You can read the 8-paragraph editorial by going to www.arrl.org/news/features/2006/08/01/1/ or by retrieving your

¹D. Sumner, K1ZZ, “Political Campaigns and the ARRL,” *QST*, Aug 2006, p 9.

copy of the August 2006 issue of *QST*. It is the lead editorial on page 9.

ARRL has been involved in advocacy or lobbying activities for decades. The difference now is that we recognize the need to broaden our involvement by enlisting us members in what is often termed “grass-roots” action. The ARRL Legislative Action Program is designed to enable members to demonstrate their interest in federal legislation related to Amateur Radio to their own US Representatives and US Senators — without leaving their home districts. This form of lobbying has proven successful for other non-profit organizations. There is every reason to believe it will be successful for ARRL and Amateur Radio.

How May I Become a Part of this Program?

To become a member of the ARRL Legislative Action Program, contact your Director. All Directors are listed on page 15 of any issue of *QST* and on the ARRL Web site at www.arrl.org/divisions/. Advise the Director of your interest in the Program. You will be placed in contact with the proper person in your state.

You may also go to the ARRL Web site to read the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document about the Program at www.arrl.org/govrelations/laprog-faq.html. This FAQ will provide basic information.

Summary

The ARRL has developed a Program through which amateurs can help enhance and support the very existence of Amateur Radio. This is the ARRL Legislative Action Program. Volunteers in this Program can perform critical work on behalf of Amateur Radio near their own homes and using information supplied to them by ARRL. No unusual skills are needed to do this job and the limited amount of training needed for it is available on the ARRL Web site. ARRL members interested in learning more about the Program should contact their Division Director.

Please join the spirits of Hiram Percy Maxim, W1AW and Senator Barry Goldwater, K7UGA, to put a strong face on Amateur Radio.

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