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Contact:

Christy Talbot

240-225-0277

ctalbot@columbiabooks.com

Authentic Messages Key in Grassroots Contacts with Legislators

“Citizens in Action” Author Stephanie Vance Discusses Effective Communications on NPR Broadcast

Bethesda, Md. (Aug. 10, 2009) – Across the country, citizens are attending townhall meetings to discuss their views on health care reform with their congressional members. However, in some meetings, citizens have shown up en masse to oppose health care reform.

While some congressional members may be scared off by these displays by their constituents, what is most important in the end is a thoughtful, personal message that is authentic, according to Stephanie Vance, author of *Citizens in Action: A Guide to Influencing Government*. Vance appeared on The Kojo Nnamdi Show on National Public Radio today to discuss advocacy and citizen engagement.

Vance stated that citizens will make their biggest impact with members of Congress by creating a message that is personal and that asks for something specific. She also said that the effort put into a message will make a difference on how a legislator will respond.

“Elected officials do pay attention to those communications,” said Vance. “But constituents really need to make sure that those communications are relevant, thoughtful, and personal in order to really rise to the top of a congressional office.”

Vance also discussed the current advocacy efforts surrounding health care reform, and how, despite the claims that this is a form of “Astroturf” lobbying, they are proof that grassroots methods do work.

“The fact that political operatives are feeding people into these townhall meetings and that people are spending a lot of money to do this demonstrates to me that a grassroots approach does work, which is why they’re trying it,” Vance said.

However, while grassroots methods are effective, Vance said that an authentic voice is especially important in grassroots engagement. While citizen advocates desire to express their opinions on health care reform efforts, they should know why they support or oppose the legislation.

“Make sure you really are familiar with the issues and that you have an authentic viewpoint to share,” said Vance. “Then you’re going to be a lot more likely to be heard.”

Further details on how to craft a personal and authentic message, as well as a template, is available in *Citizens in Action*. Additionally, *Citizens in Action* includes other key points Vance mentioned on the Kojo Nnamdi show, including:

- The “Top 10 Things Elected Officials Hate to Hear” for grassroots advocates who participate in lobby days or site visits
- A breakdown of the staff in a legislator’s office
- A legislator profile worksheet for use in determining a legislator’s interests

More information on Citizens in Action is available at <http://www.uscongresshandbook.com/Advocacy-Products.aspx#Product36>.

A link to a broadcast of Stephanie Vance’s appearance on The Kojo Nnamdi Show is also available at <http://wamu.org/programs/kn/09/08/10.php#27367>.

About the Author

With 20 years of experience in Washington, DC Stephanie Vance, known nationally and internationally as the Advocacy Guru, knows the insider’s secrets to influencing government. She has worked at a prominent DC law firm, as a lobbyist for National Public Radio and as a Congressional aide, holding positions as Legislative Director and Staff Director for three different members of Congress. She is the author of *Government by the People: How to Communicate with Congress* and the fabjob.com guide *Get a Job on Capitol Hill*.

Stephanie’s work stems from a deep and abiding belief that the US system of government is effective only when citizens are active and well-informed participants. She helps citizens across the country take action through her speeches and training sessions for groups both small and large, including nationally recognized organizations like the American Library Association and the Humane Society of the United States. Her message has been heard by tens of thousands of advocates across the country and around the world many of whom are making the world a better place (at least in their view) through the application of her advice.

Ms. Vance holds a Bachelor’s Degree in Political Science as well as two Master’s degrees, one in Legislative Affairs from George Washington University and the other in Liberal Studies from Georgetown University (this is not the study of how to be a liberal). A member of the National Speakers Association, she recently earned the NSA’s prestigious Certified Speaking Professional designation. She is also a member of the American Society of Association Executives, Women in Government Relations and is mentioned in Who’s Who in American Women.

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