



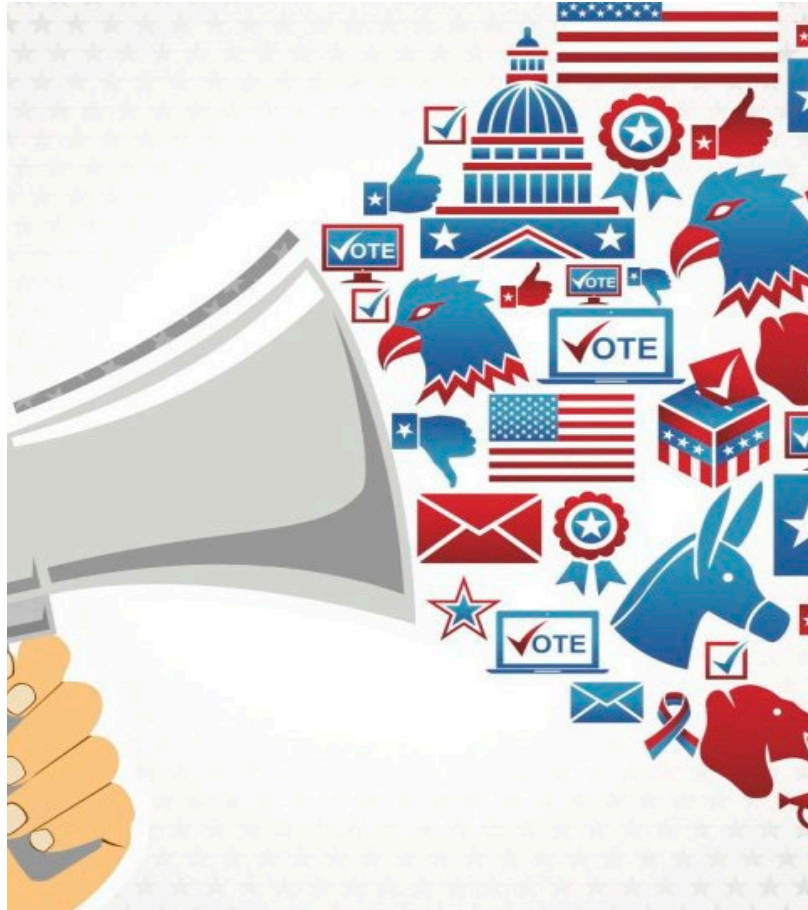
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS

POLITICAL COMMUNICATIONS

March 30, 2026

GETTING STARTED

BEFORE WE BEGIN ...



There isn't one perfect way to do political communications – find what works best for your Local.

Don't just tell your members – show them!

Politics is 24/7, 365 business – you're only one election away from losing your wins.

The political landscape is always shifting – you must be willing to adapt to new realities.

You are fire fighters, not politicians – never forget that.



**“THE MAIN THING IS TO KEEP THE
MAIN THING THE MAIN THING.”**

FORMER GOV. HALEY BARBOUR

WHAT ARE POLITICAL COMMUNICATIONS?



Any communication from your Local regarding political candidates, legislative or policy issues, public campaigns, ballot initiatives, or other political activity.

2 main types of political communications:
Internal and External



INTERNAL

VS.

EXTERNAL

Membership

- Union Meetings
- Email program
- Social media
- Website
- Newsletters
- Texts
- Union Chain of Command

Elected officials, media, and the public

- Social media
- Press Conferences
- Community Events
- Op-Eds/Letters to the Editor
- Advertisements
- Rallies



5 KEYS TO EFFECTIVE POLITICAL COMMUNICATIONS

Simplicity

Consistency

Repetition

Timeliness

Authenticity



Before every communication, ask yourself:

Who's my audience?

- Members? Lawmakers? The public?
- Your audience should guide your message.

What's my message?

- What is the one thing I want the reader to take away from this?
- Remember - less is more.



FIRE FIGHTERS' POLITICAL ADVANTAGES



70% of Americans have a positive view of fire fighter unions – the highest rating of any labor organization (YouGov).

80% of Americans find fire fighters trustworthy (Ipsos). Only 24% trust politicians/the government (Pew Research).

Your greatest weapon is the support you have from the public – learn how to use that power to advance your political goals.



WHAT'S YOUR LOCAL'S POLITICAL CALL TO ACTION?



- What motivates your members? Staffing? Wages? Health and Safety? Retirement benefits?
- Find the issues that are most important to your membership – their priorities should guide yours.



3 KEY AREAS OF FOCUS

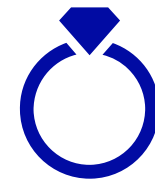
THE 3 “E’S”



Education



Endorsements



Engagement



EDUCATION: WHAT'S YOUR STARTING POINT?



How engaged are your members?



Do they follow what's going on at the local and state levels? Only the federal? Not engaged at all?



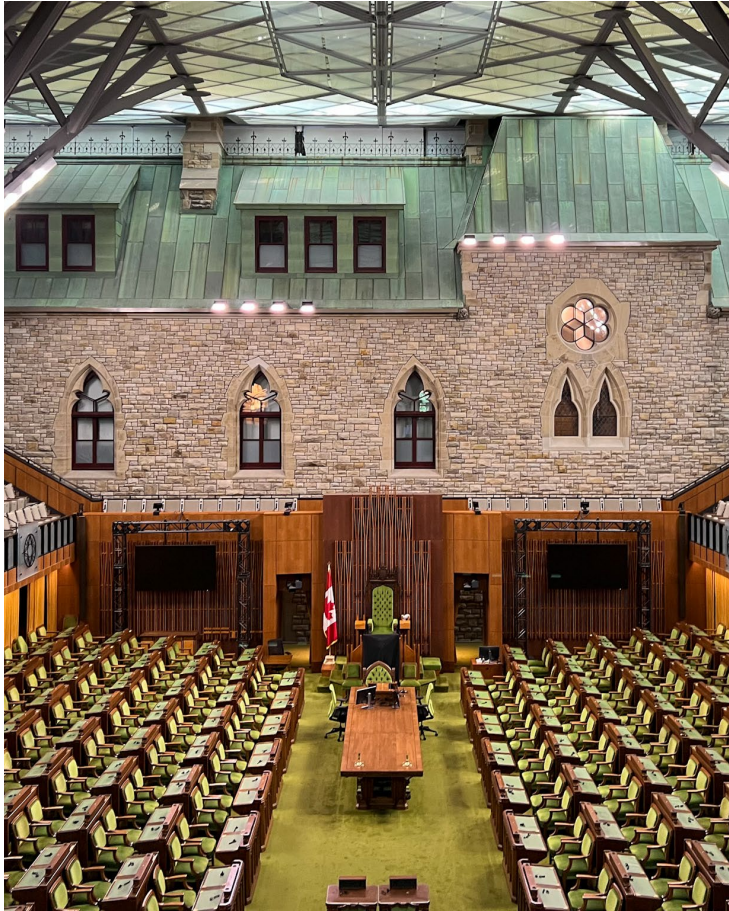
How often are you telling your members what your Local/PAC is working on?



Do your members vote as fire fighters?



EDUCATION IN PRACTICE



You can't expect your members to know your political goals – you have to teach them.



Don't want to be in politics? Too bad. The price of not engaging is steep.



Teach your members about your Local's history – how did you get where you are today?



Show members how the decisions politicians make directly impact their jobs as fire fighters.



OPPORTUNITIES TO EDUCATE YOUR MEMBERSHIP



Newsletters



Email updates



Union meetings



Webinars &
“Town Halls”



Face-to-face
conversations
(individual)



Social media
posts



Websites





ENDORSEMENTS

- One of the most powerful tools you have as a Local.
- Fire fighters are authorities on public safety issues – the public wants to hear your opinion.
- Endorsements are your best opportunity to showcase your political power and influence.



ENDORSEMENTS – THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Why are we endorsing this candidate? What are our expectations?
- Transparency is important – your membership should feel involved in the process.
- All endorsements should be based only on fire fighter and union issues.
- Consider the timing of your endorsement – when will it have the most impact?
- Any candidate you endorse **MUST** have a completed questionnaire on file.
- Does your endorsement automatically come with a contribution?
- Know the rules of the road (especially with contributions). Keep your lawyer involved.
- Don't just tell your members who you're endorsing – show them why that candidate earned your endorsement.



CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRES



Each candidate you're considering endorsing should receive your questionnaire.



Ask for specific policy commitments, their positions on your key issues, and whether they support pro-labor policies.



Ask candidates how they've shown they'll support fire fighters and emergency workers through their previous experiences.



Keep your questions direct but provide the necessary background information to ensure they can answer fully.



CANDIDATE VETTING

- Don't let your endorsement become a public relations crisis.
- Politicians will tell you what you want to hear. The real test is whether they advanced your goals when they had the power to do so.
- Review their previous public statements, policy positions, and how they've voted in the past (if applicable).
- Your state associations and HQ can help with candidate vetting. Use these resources to your advantage.



ARE YOU PREPARED TO LOSE?

- In politics, you'll never win 100% of the time.
- Have you thought about what a defeat would mean for your members, your department, and your community?
- Losing doesn't always mean there's nothing gained. A strong showing by your Local – even in defeat – can advance your political interests.



ENGAGEMENT

- The daily work of communicating your political activity and wins.
- This is where you set yourself up for success.
- It's also how you become a trusted source of information for your members.



POLITICAL COMMUNICATIONS IN PRACTICE

DEVELOPING YOUR STRATEGY

- A sound political communication plan connects your message, relationship, and campaign activity back to the same strategic goal: **improving the lives and safety of firefighters – and the public we serve.**
- A strong message begins with a strong sense of identity and a clear set of objectives.
- Once the objective is clear, the tactics bring it to life.
- Don't worry about being perfect – focus on being purposeful.



**“EVERYONE HAS A PLAN UNTIL
THEY GET PUNCHED IN THE
FACE.”**

— MIKE TYSON



ADVERSITY WILL COME – LEARN HOW TO ADAPT

- Even the best communications plans will face roadblocks – changes in the political landscape, events, sentiment among members, etc.
- Good communication strategies anticipate challenges, absorb them, and adapt to the new realities. That’s how you stay in the fight and win the next round.
- If your goals are clear, you’ll almost always be able to recover from adversity.



HOW TO REACH YOUR MEMBERS AND THE PUBLIC

- Newsletters
- Op-Eds and Letters to the Editor
- Press releases
- Websites
- Surveys
- Candidate forums & town halls
- Media appearances
- Coalition building
- Social Media
- Press Conferences
- Statements
- Billboards, TV, radio, and online ads
- Text/SMS messaging
- Podcasts
- Interviews



SOCIAL MEDIA

What should you be posting?

- Legislative accomplishments and victories
- Candidate endorsements
- Policy Priorities
- Vote and/or cosponsor breakdowns
- Meetings with elected officials
- News stories about your work
- Political events
- Calls to Action
- Political history of your Local




SOCIAL MEDIA (CONT.)


- Repetition is key for social media algorithms – you must post consistently.
- Use hashtags and emojis to catch the reader’s eye.
- Always try to include a visual component – photos, graphics, videos, etc.
- Tag elected officials when relevant.
- Utilize white space to your advantage.
- Engagement is the “name of the game” – pay attention to what posts members interact with and what ones they don’t.
- Social media is an effective tool, but it can also invite criticism. Be prepared to stand behind your message and avoid public debates in the comments.



EFFECTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

 International Association of Fire Fighters •
Published by Brandwatch
· March 26 at 12:30 PM · 🌐

🔥 Collective bargaining is what helps keep fire departments fully staffed, #firefighters safe on the job, and communities properly protected.
But Virginia Governor **Glenn Youngkin**'s recent veto of HB 2764 continues to deny many Virginia #firefighters and other public employees a seat at the negotiating table.
[Learn more](#) ⓘ




IAFF.ORG
VA Gov vetoes bills to expand collective bargaining rights for fire fighters - IAFF
Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin announced this week he would veto HB 2764, legislation that ...


[See insights and ads](#) [Boost post](#)

👍👎🗨️ 470 233 comments 302 shares

👍 Like 🗨️ Comment 📄 Share

 International Association of Fire Fighters •
Published by Brandwatch
· March 12 at 5:01 PM · 🌐

🔥 After attending her swearing-in ceremony last night, General President **Edward A. Kelly** sat down with **Secretary Lori Chavez-DeRemer** during her first full day in office.
Together, they discussed important priorities for the #IAFF, like the **Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (#OSHA)** proposed Emergency Response Standard (ERS), which would be the first real update to #firefighter safety standards in decades.
[Learn more](#) ⓘ



IAFF.ORG
GP Kelly represents the IAFF at labor secretary's swearing-in ceremony - IAFF
Last night, Lori Chavez-DeRemer was sworn in as the 30th U.S. Secretary of Labor during an ev...

[See insights and ads](#) [Boost post](#)

👍 206 25 comments 21 shares



EFFECTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS (CONT.)



iaffpresident • Follow
Washington D.C.

iaffpresident One mission, and it's zero fail: To improve the lives and livelihoods of fire fighters, emergency medical workers, and rescue workers.
5w

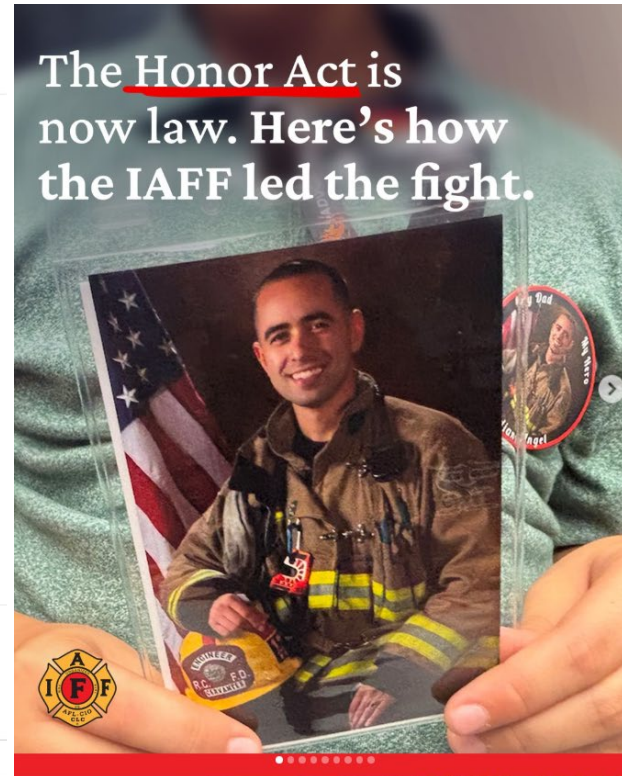
firehousedog_fancy 🍌🍌🍌
2w Reply

mike.murphy.9066 TRUTH
3w Reply

rtimmy11 🍌🍌
5w Reply

172 likes
March 4

Log in to like or comment.



iaffofficial

iaffofficial 🏠 The Honoring Our Fallen Heroes Act is now law ✓

For years, families of #firefighters who died from job-related cancers were denied federal death and education benefits. The IAFF led the fight to change that.

Working with Republicans, Democrats, and President Trump, the Honor Act ensures families of our fallen are no longer left behind.

Swipe ➡️ to see how the IAFF got it done 🙌
2w

hearts4heroesusa Yesssss 🙌 well done by all.
2w Reply

fireman_matty Awesome! Miguel and I went to the basic fire academy together. ❤️ He's missed

View insights Boost post

Liked by **iaffpresident** and 808 others
December 22, 2025

Add a comment... Post



EFFECTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS (CONT.)

 **International Association of Fire Fighters** 
Published by Brandwatch  · November 4, 2025 · 

It's Election Day! 🗳️

Voters across the U.S. will decide key local and state races, as well as ballot measures that impact public safety and [#firefighters](#).

Every vote counts. Make sure you GET OUT AND VOTE!

Find your polling location  www.vote.org/polling-place-locator/

Today is Election Day.
GET OUT AND VOTE!



 336  88 comments  118 shares

 Like  Comment  Share



EFFECTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS (CONT.)

International Association of Fire Fighters
 Published by Brandwatch
 December 11, 2024

REPEAL WEP/GPO RALLY

General President **Edward A. Kelly**, Labor leaders, & Members of Congress will rally on Capitol Hill today to call for a vote on the Social Security Fairness Act - bipartisan legislation to repeal the unfair WEP/GPO penalties.

Join us and make your voices heard!

Join America's unions and members of Congress to call for the repeal of the WEP/GPO.

FIGHT WITH LABOR.

Wednesday, Dec. 11, 2024
 11:30 a.m.

Upper Senate Park at the U.S. Capitol

260 New Jersey Ave NW
 Washington, D.C. 20001

135 likes 1 comment 36 shares

Like Comment Share

International Association of Fire Fighters
 Published by Brandwatch
 December 21, 2024

BREAKING

The Senate has passed the Social Security Fairness Act!!

In a historic vote, 76 Senators voted to finally repeal WEP/GPO and ensure **#firefighters**, police officers, teachers, and other public servants can retire with dignity. The bill now goes to President Biden's desk!

Learn more



IAFF.ORG

Senate passes Social Security Fairness Act, sends WEP/GPO repeal to the White House - IAFF

1.2K likes 191 comments 1.5K shares

See insights and ads Boost post

International Association of Fire Fighters
 Published by Brandwatch
 December 23, 2024

VICTORY ON WEP/GPO

On Friday night, the Senate overwhelmingly passed H.R. 82, the Social Security Fairness Act, in a historic vote for **#firefighters** and other public servants.

Thank you to the 76 Senators who voted to repeal WEP/GPO!



See insights and ads Boost post

295 likes 62 comments 29 shares

Like Comment Share



EFFECTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS (CONT.)

International Association of Fire Fighters
Published by Brandwatch
January 5

BREAKING

The Social Security Fairness Act is now law ✓

With the President's signature today, the WEP/GPO penalties on retired #firefighters and other public service workers have officially been repealed!

Read more



IAFF.ORG

Social Security Fairness Act becomes law - IAFF
Today, President Joe Biden signed the Social Security Fairness Act into law.

808 107 comments 521 shares

Like Comment Share

International Association of Fire Fighters
Published by Brandwatch
February 26

IMPORTANT WEP/GPO UPDATE

Retirees penalized by the WEP/GPO can expect an earlier payment from the [Social Security Administration](#).

Learn when you can now expect to see your increased benefits



IAFF.ORG

Larger Social Security payments on the way for retirees - IAFF
The Social Security Administration (SSA) announced a major update for retirees impacted by t...

134 28 comments 181 shares

Like Comment Share

International Association of Fire Fighters
Published by Brandwatch
March 3

The road to repealing WEP/GPO wasn't easy – but it was a fight worth fighting.

With the Social Security Fairness Act now law, #firefighters, cops, teachers, and other public employees will finally get the full retirement benefits they've earned and paid into.

See how the IAFF led the fight

#FightforFairness #LegCon25 #WEP #GPO



YOUTUBE.COM

The Fight for Fairness: Repealing the WEP/GPO
The #IAFF led the charge to repeal the Windfall Elimination Provision and Government Pension...

204 32 comments 48 shares

Like Comment Share



FRAMING: WORDS THAT WORK

- Always use verbs in your copy:
 - Protect, earn, secure, strengthen, equip, respond, serve, etc.
- Avoid words that sound entitled:
 - Owed, deserve, demand, expect, pay, more money, etc.
- Your language should always come to back to service, community, and cooperation.
 - *Not "Fire fighters want" but "Our community needs"*



CASE STUDY: SCENARIO 1

Your Local/State/Provincial is facing:

- Chronic understaffing
- A Mayor and City Council critical of fire fighters
- False narratives about overtime abuse

What's your communication strategy to fight back?



CASE STUDY: WINNIPEG LOCAL 867

Fight: Winnipeg members faced a staffing crisis and a hostile council/mayor.

Tools they used:

- Op-eds
- Social Media
- GIS study map
- Media interviews



CASE STUDY: SCENARIO 2

Your Local/State/Provincial is facing:

- Double line-of-duty death
- Hostile mayor and city leaders
- Federal investigation and public scrutiny

What's your communication strategy to fight back?



CASE STUDY: NEWARK, NJ LOCAL 71



Fight: Two members were tragically killed after the city failed to provide proper training for responding to ship fires. The city blamed the fire fighters.

Tools they used:

- Disciplined messaging/TPs
- Built a coalition of support
- Relied on investigation findings
- IAFF support



CASE STUDY: SCENARIO 3

Your Local/State/Provincial is facing:

- Hostile incumbent mayor
- Upcoming elections
- A community that's undereducated on fire service issues

What's your communication strategy to fight back?



CASE STUDY: STRATFORD, CT LOCAL 998

Fight: Hostile, long-time incumbent mayor who refused to back the fire service

Tools they used:

- Endorsed a pro-labor mayoral candidate
- Coordinated with other unions
- Social media
- Strategic Campaigns



CALLS TO ACTION

- Mobilizing your membership is crucial to a successful political effort.
- You'll need to create a sense of urgency among your membership.
- Tools to help your members get engaged:
 - VoterVoice (free through IAFF HQ)
 - Social media campaigns
 - Rallies, press conferences, committee hearings, etc.
 - Conference calls, regular email updates, and union meetings
 - Tabling, door knocking, etc.
- Unionism is a team sport. Every member must understand the game plan – who you're talking to, why we're engaging, and what outcome the Local is working toward.



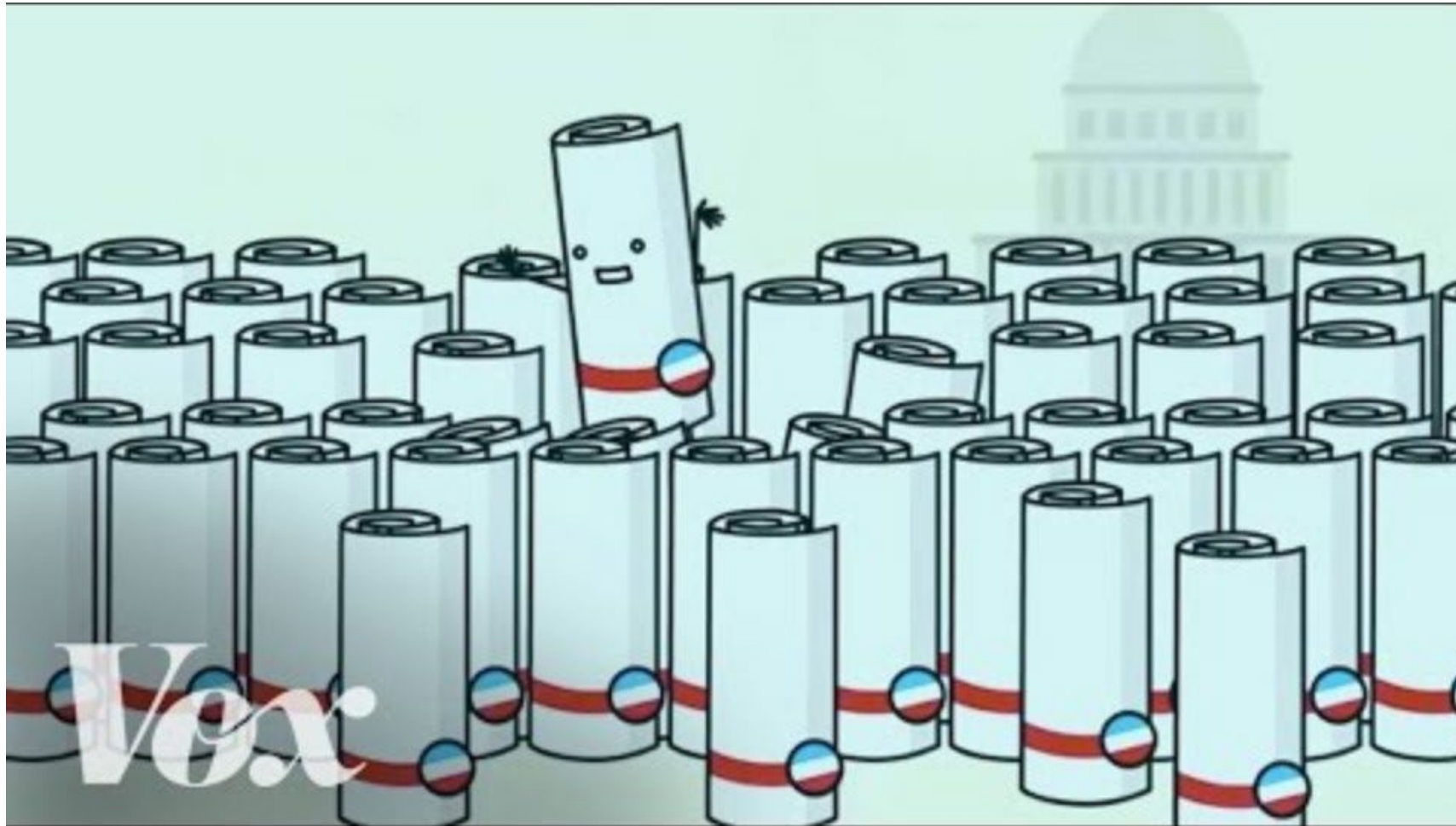
**OTHER THINGS
TO KEEP IN
MIND**

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

- Building relationships with the media is essential if you want your Local's story to be heard.
- But be cautious. The media is not your friend, but they don't have to be your enemy.
- Focus on building strategic relationships with journalists who cover local or state politics or those on the labor or public safety beats.
- These partnerships can amplify your message and support your mission when it matters most.
- Be a good source – meet their deadlines, invite them to your events (community events, Fire Ops, charity work, etc.), and have a designated member assigned as a press contact. Your Local should also have a media list for reporters in your area.
- **Remember:** Never say something to a reporter you don't want to see on the front page – even if you agree it's "off the record".



WHY LEGISLATING IS SO CHALLENGING



COMMUNICATING THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS



Designed to be slow and force compromise.

There's always an opposing interest.

Set realistic expectations – you won't get everything you want.

Locals should have designees tracking legislative activity.

Legislating isn't over until it's over.



TOOLS TO PROFESSIONALIZE YOUR COMMUNICATIONS

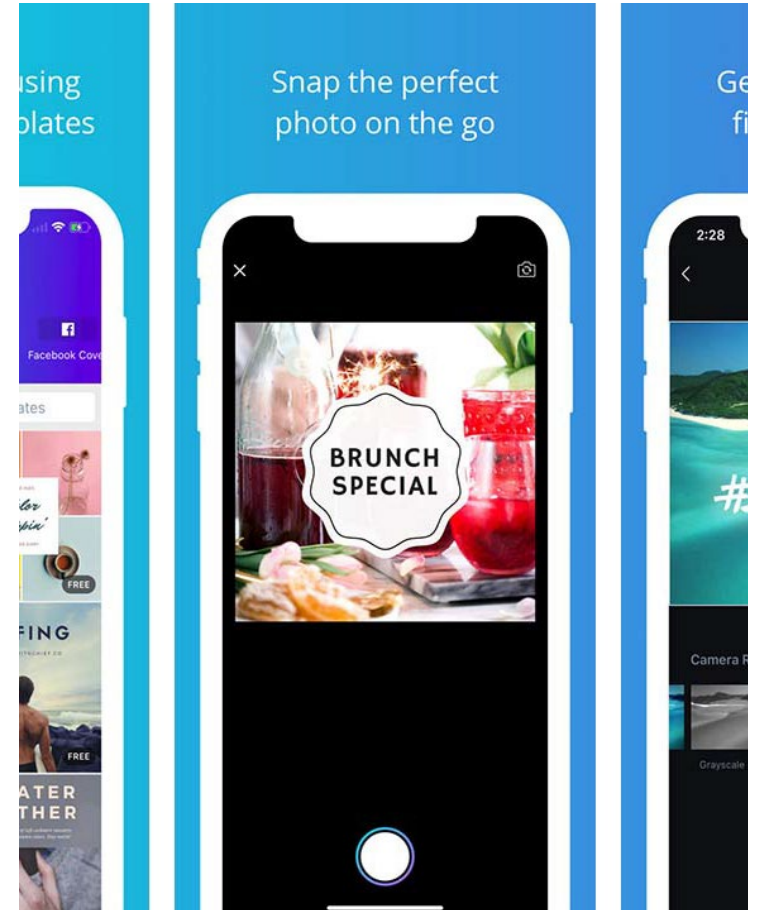
Canva (free & paid versions)

iMovie (free)

Grammarly (free)

Pod Beam (podcast hosting)

Adobe Suite (Premier, Photoshop, Illustrator, Lightroom, Express, etc).



IAFF HQ POLITICAL COMMUNICATIONS SERVICES

Toolkits (Staffing, Bargaining Rights, Organizing)

Graphic and Logo design

Digital ads

Drafting a communications plan

Media training, Op-Ed assistance, and media lists

Social media audit and assistance

Talking points and message development

Strategic Campaigns can also help; email your DVP first





THANK YOU!
ANY QUESTIONS?



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