

Presidential Candidate

★ ★ ★ Site Visits ★ ★ ★

Restaurant visits and tours by presidential candidates provide you with opportunities to educate them and their staffs about the role your restaurant and association plays in important issues in our communities. In addition, these visits can provide press opportunities and give candidates a chance to meet with constituents. Better yet, if elected, the presidential hopeful will remember your role in your community and your hospitality.

Candidates have a dilemma. They want to remain busy, look accessible, prove they are “typical American’s,” and still have a local setting to deliver a campaign message. What better venue to do all this than a local busy restaurant? Since they are looking for a location to do an “impromptu” political stop we need to provide them an opportunity, and at the same time maximize this event as a chance to deliver a message that restaurants are the cornerstone of America with lot’s of stories to tell.

A good restaurant visit by a Congressional or Presidential candidate, however, takes careful planning.

Decide who to invite. Is this a visit for candidates, other members of Congress, and/or staff? Restaurant visits are appropriate for any candidate, whether they are running for the White House, the State House, or the Court House. You can invite Presidential candidates, elected officials or staff. Consider starting with a local or state staff person and working up to a visit from the presidential candidate or elected official. A staff-level visit can be just as important as a member visit.

Working out logistics. If this is a scheduled, and not a drop-in visit, do not assume that the candidate or staff will take care of any aspect of the trip, from travel arrangements to supplying an umbrella on a rainy day. There is likely to be a range of considerations that apply to your particular situation; the key is to have no surprises. A detailed agenda should clarify who will do what and when.

- **Transportation.** How will the guest get to and from the event? Will the office provide transportation?
- **Time.** How much time can the candidate commit to the event? Do not try to cram too much into a short visit. Make sure you hit the highlights.
- **Food.** If this visit is going to occur during a regular meal-time, consider setting up a discussion over an informal buffet or box lunch. Often, candidates won’t have time to eat between meetings. Your recognition of that fact will be appreciated, and it is a perfect opportunity to show off your restaurant’s specialty dishes.
- **Weather.** Obviously, you can’t control the weather, but you can be prepared for all possibilities. Make sure you have all necessary items to make the visit pleasant for everyone.

Send the invitation. Send a letter to the candidate and staff explaining who you are and what you would like to show them (sample letter included). Include directions to the restaurant, as well as a requested amount of time. Place a phone call to the candidate’s scheduler to make sure the invitation has been received. Keep in mind that you will have to arrange the tour around the candidate’s schedule. In addition to formal recesses, members of Congress are most likely to be in their home districts on Mondays and Fridays. Don’t be discouraged if a visit is not scheduled immediately. Be flexible and persistent. Invite them to drop by for a tour and cup of coffee the next time they pass through town. Most candidates will occasionally have a few minutes of free time during a busy campaign schedule. Leave the date open ended, and the candidate may take you up on your invitation.

1. **Choose the location.** If you have several restaurants, determine the best location for the visit, making sure to obtain any necessary consent beforehand.
2. **Prepare information.** A packet of materials for the visitor should include:
 - Pertinent names, addresses, and phone numbers;
 - Background materials on your restaurant and association;
 - Your “story” about how you got started, donations to charity, or something unique about your employee team, and
 - Your NRA or SRA organization’s top three issues.

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Know your story. The reason for inviting a candidate or staff member to your restaurant is to educate them on the great things our profession does. This is your chance to share your personal stories and examples of how government regulations, red tape, tax policy, immigration, legal cases all impact your restaurant and your workers. Don't just talk economic data or statistics; discuss how a worker moved from minimum wage in the back of the house to manager of an entire shift. Talk about how the minimum wage increase means you now have fewer staff. Show specifically how ADA suits are frivolous. Introduce the candidates to your team members, since these are all potential voters.

Practice or rehearse your welcome at the front of the house, what you will discuss as you tour the back of the house, and what you will discuss over a quick cup of coffee. And be prepared to be asked for your support, vote and potentially a donation.

Recording the event. Be sure to capture this exciting occasion.

- **Photographer.** Consider hiring a photographer or having

someone on your staff take pictures with a digital camera. E-mail the photographs to the campaign, the individuals and or the media.

- **Recorder.** Although you don't want someone recording the visit verbatim, assign someone the task of jotting down notes from the visit. You can turn these notes into an article for your association's newsletter or an editorial for your local newspaper.
- **Media.** Candidates and members of Congress like voters to know that they are paying attention to the needs and interests of the district or state. One great way to do that is to have the media document these site visits. Be sure to check with the candidate's office before inviting media. In most cases, you'll find the office is willing to help.

Following up. Once the visit is over, send a thank-you letter to the candidate and staff. Reiterate the key issues you discussed, and offer to answer any questions. If the local media ran any positive articles on the visit, include copies with your letter. Finally, include a photo of the visit for the candidate to use.

What if the candidate just stops by for a meal not a tour?

As any good restaurateur understands, we are hosts for people who want a good meal, and good company. Candidates might not have time for a long visit, and want to conduct business or have some down time with family members. Respect their privacy, as you would any customer. But if appropriate, recognize their presence, thank them for their business, and offer to show them around your restaurant to meet other diners and your co-workers. Candidates and their staff will quickly let you know if they would welcome or have time for a visit. Most candidates will appreciate your offer to meet voters. In particular, candidates are often reluctant to campaign in your establishment without an invitation, since they do not want to interrupt your customers or business.