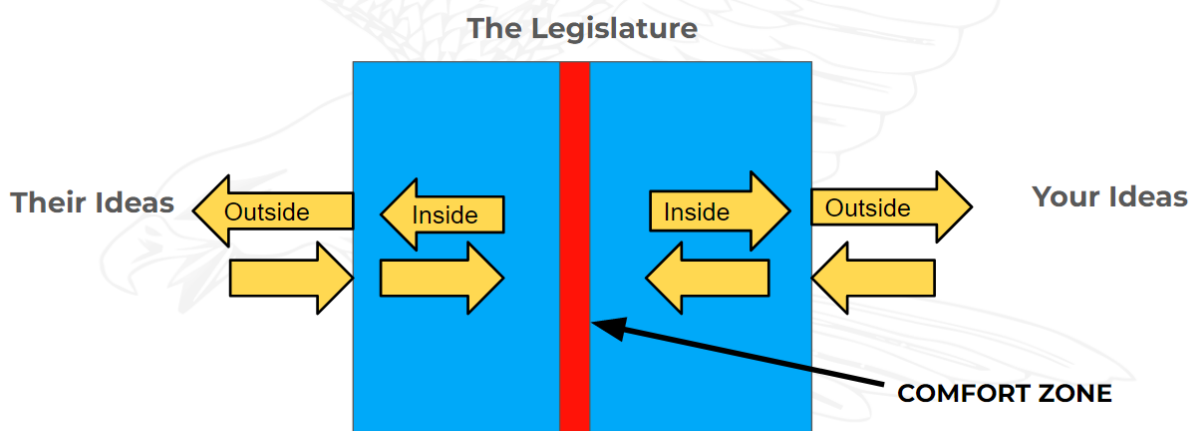


## Controlling the Comfort Zone

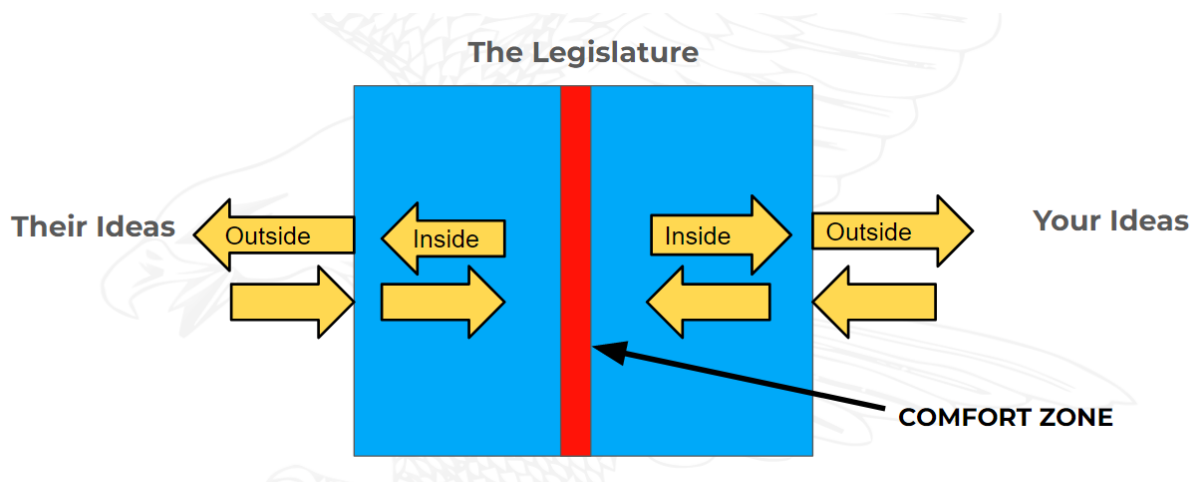
Many think that the only way to make political change is to run for office. This is called the direct path to power. What few understand is that there is a less glamorous and much more powerful way to achieve change: the indirect path to power. Those on the indirect path control the environment of those on the direct path. We can control politics because we can control politicians thanks to their predictable behavior. A successful policy change initiative through the indirect path requires an understanding of the overton window, and how inside/outside forces work.

The overton window is the range of policies politically acceptable to the elected officials at a given time. In the legislature, the forces that define the window are inside players and outside organizations that can impact reelection. Most politicians will stay in the very middle of the window known as the “comfort zone”. This comfort zone shifts as the edges of the window are pushed and pulled. To begin pulling the window in our direction, we need to pick an advantageous fight and draft a bill that doesn’t compromise on our principles.



In the legislature, we are an outside force and the principled candidates we elected are our inside players. These champions on the inside initiate the policy fight by sponsoring a bill and forcing recorded votes. Whether we win or lose, the recorded vote forces each legislator to tell us which forces have more sway over them. As an activist group we are tasked with targeting the most vulnerable opponents to the bill and demonstrating that voters are angry with their position and the wrong vote will threaten their reelection. These inside and outside forces working together pull the edge of the window and our ideological opponents will use them too. On both sides, party leadership and certain outside interest groups will resist change and try to push the window back to where it was. They will call the position “extreme” and threaten the reelection of those that support the bill. This political inertia will always work against us when we are on the offense. If we force the vote every legislative cycle, and cause political pain in every electoral cycle, we will gradually reshape the vote until our bill passes. The answer is always to double down.

## Discussion Questions



Pick a political issue (such as guns, schools, vaccines, or foreign intervention) and answer the following questions as a group:

1. What is the comfort zone position?
2. What is our position on the issue?
3. What outside groups could we work with to pressure legislators and pull them towards our position?
4. What inside/outside forces are our ideological enemies deploying on this issue?
5. What establishment inside/outside forces will resist our pull and try to push legislators back towards the comfort zone?

Repeat for many issues as time allows