



GET INVOLVED WITH POLITICAL ADVOCACY

Democracy is not dead, and your voice does matter. Writing letters and making phone calls to government officials and corporate leaders are effective ways of affecting public policy. Members of the House and the Senate read their mail! It is simply good politics. Members respond to their mail, and inform constituents of their current positions on issues.

Policy makers do pay attention when even a moderate number of people contact them about an issue. Here are a few tips on how to make your letters and phone calls have an impact.

LETTER WRITING

An effective letter is:

- * Personal. Form letters are recognizable and carry less weight.
- * Concise.
- * Informed. Acknowledge that you understand the issue.

Four key tips in writing the letter:

- * Come to the point quickly and clearly in your own words.
- * Say exactly what you want the legislator to do.
- * Cover only one subject.
- * Be courteous. Do not antagonize.

Additional tips:

- * Put your address on the letter; envelopes can be thrown away.
- * Ask a question. This requires response.
- * Write back! React to the member's response. This is a two-way communication.

Your letter can be typed or handwritten, and one single sided page is the most readable. Two single sided pages are the suggested maximum by the US Congressional Handbook. Faxing is now considered to be the preferred way of receiving letters. Each representative's fax number can be found on their website.

WAYS TO REINFORCE YOUR POSITION:

- * Enclose an article that relates to the policy or legislation in question.
- * If you have any personal association with the policy maker, say so. Nothing is more effective in getting an elected official's attention.
- * Write or call a second time. Follow-up letters have a much stronger impact than an initial communication. Thank a legislator for taking a stand you agree with or ask a question about unsatisfactory answers.

PHONE CALLS

When you call:

- * State your name, location and the reason for your call.
- * Ask to speak to the aide who deals with the issue you are calling about. If that person is unavailable, leave a short message with all the pertinent information.
- * Do not be intimidated. You are a concerned citizen, and you are dealing with public servants who are there to serve and represent you.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Writing a letter to the editor:

There are two main reasons to write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper. The first is to express an opinion. The second is to present news that is not covered by the bulk of the paper. These reasons are linked together, and below are some tips in getting your point across:

- * Begin with a dramatic statement. State a fact that captures your issue as important.
- * Be fair. There is no reason to criticize if the facts of the issue will prove your case. Unreasonable "finger pointing" is not persuasive.
- * Keep the letter short and to the point.
- * Stick to one topic per letter.
- * Give credit to yourself and credibility to the letter. Sign with your name and town or city district in which you live. If you are writing from the perspective of a church or organization, list that as well.