

Make Your Voice and Perspective Heard Through Effective Letters to Elected Officials and Media Outlets

Some people think voting is the only action they can take to make an impact. While an admirable and advisable contribution to American society, voting is not the only way civic-minded citizens can make an impact. A much-neglected and much-misunderstood form of action takes place between elections—communication with the people your vote did, or did not, put into office.

WRITING ELECTED OFFICIALS

Many people mistakenly believe that elected officials do not care what they have to say. Think about it: You elected them. They need your vote to stay in office. And when they hear from you, they know that you are not the only one who feels strongly about an issue, you are just one of the *few* who actually took the time to share your feelings.

The more organized those feelings are, the more likely your elected officials are to respond.

WHERE DO YOU STAND?

Considering how important you are to legislators' jobs, how many times have you interacted with them while they were in office?

Have you ever written a letter, placed a phone call, made a personal visit, signed a petition? If you have never done any of these things, you are not alone.

But you are ignoring the reality that your legislators take what you say seriously.

If you take the time to put your thoughts on paper, they know that for every one person who took the time to

write them, they have many other constituents who feel the same way.

Every elected official knows that one letter represents more than just one person. Various estimates put the equation at anywhere from ten to one thousand, but the exact number is irrelevant. What matters is the one letter that you can write today, the one letter that your elected official cannot ignore, the one letter that signals that this is an issue that his constituency cares about—and if he wants to stay in office, he had better care about it, too.

If they never hear from anyone, they will never know that you disagree/agree with them. Their jobs depend on responding to feedback, so election night is not full of disappointing developments for their career's future.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the editor work roughly the same way. Newspapers exist because people buy them. If, as a reader, you have a complaint, let them know. You may just be surprised by the response you receive.

Take James Lambert, for example. A faithful reader of the *Los Angeles Times*, he was offended that the paper sold ads in the sports pages to massage parlors, adult clubs, and escort services. So he wrote a letter to the editor. Not only did he get a response, the response informed him that “not only are we not going to

run them in the sports section anymore, we are not going to run such ads at all!” One letter! It made a difference.

You feel strongly enough about an issue to take time out of your day to write a letter addressing it. How many other people feel just as strongly, but are not confident that they can convey their thoughts well, and so they do not write that letter? That is what this impact tool is all about: giving you the keys to writing thoughtful, well-spoken letters in the confidence that they will get results.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

should . . .

- a. Be brief—no more than 200-300 typed words.
- b. Keep to the point.
- c. Mention “In response to” or “In reference to your article dated _____.”
- d. State your views in an organized way.
- e. Be informative, factual, and useful to readers.
- f. Be polite, even if you disagree.
- g. Always include your name, address and telephone number. (In case the editor needs to call you.)

Anonymous letters carry no weight. *The editor sometimes prints “Letter Guidelines” in your local newspaper.*

LOCATING ADDRESSES

You can find accurate addresses for federal, state, and local officials in the Yellow/White pages of your telephone book or through the CENTER FOR RECLAIMING AMERICA's Legislative Action Center at: www.reclaimamerica.org.

PROPER FORMAT FOR LETTERS TO ELECTED OFFICIALS

Your Name
Your Address
Your City, Your State and Zip Code

Date

The Honorable (full name of elected official you are addressing)
United States (Senate or House of Representatives)
Washington, D.C. 20510

Reference: Topic/Issue/Bill number

Dear Senator or Representative Last Name:

I am writing you to support/oppose/encourage . . . specify issue including bill number if available . . . because explain how this issue affects you and our country.

Other specific information and arguments.

I hope that you share my concerns and will support/oppose bill number or title. I look forward to hearing your views on this issue.

Sincerely,
Your Signature
Your Name

MAKE SURE YOUR LETTER IS:

NEAT—typed or legibly handwritten is best
ADDRESSED CORRECTLY—see above for proper business letter format
TIMELY—dealing with a *specific* current issue
BRIEF—no more than 300 words/1 page
ACCURATE—only make statements that you can document
ORIGINAL—composed by you
POLITE
PROOFREAD—preferably by a friend with a good grasp on English grammar

REMEMBER to ASK FOR A RESPONSE.

REMEMBER to EXPRESS APPRECIATION AND THANK PEOPLE WHEN THEY TAKE YOUR POSITION ON AN IMPORTANT ISSUE.

ALL LETTERS

should be . . .

1. Typed or handwritten legibly and neatly.
2. Addressed correctly:
 - a. Current date
 - b. Title of the person to whom you are sending the letter
 - c. Name of recipient
 - d. Address of recipient
 - e. Subject/reference topic
3. Timely—dealing with a specified current issue
4. Brief—no more than 300 words
5. Accurate and/or documented
6. Original—composed by you
7. Polite
8. Identified with your name, address, and signature
9. Written as a draft, proofread, and rewritten, if necessary.

Remember: Ask for a response.

Remember: Express appreciation and thank people when they take the right position on an important issue.

Remember: One well-written professional letter is usually received by officials as representing 100 people.

LETTERS TO ELECTED OFFICIALS CHECKLIST:

- | | | |
|--|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| a. Current date | registered voter in their | could meet with the |
| b. Correct title of official. | district. | elected official about the |
| c. Your full name, address, and signature. | f. Stay on the issue. | issue. |
| d. Topic/issue and bill number. | g. State your position. | k. <u>Ask for a response:</u> |
| e. State that you are a | h. Be brief. | “Please let me hear from |
| | i. Be polite; don’t preach. | you on this issue.” |
| | j. Ask if “ <i>your group</i> ” | |

The CENTER FOR RECLAIMING AMERICA is an outreach of Coral Ridge Ministries. Our goal is to connect citizens like you to vital resources so you can reclaim your community for Christ. For more information, contact us:

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