

## HOW TO WRITE TO YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

Have you ever gotten angry about an action taken by Congress or the President? Have you ever wanted to "sound off" to your elected officials or civil servants? Some people share their views with radio talk shows, but most of us just gripe to our families, friends, or people we work with. Is there a better way?

It is far more productive to exercise your right and responsibility to get involved in the political process by contacting your elected officials. Elected officials are very sensitive to the views of their constituents. It does pay to speak up, if you do it effectively.

Your elected officials can be reached by telephone (a secretary will take your message), or by mail. Some can be reached by FAX or e-mail. Perhaps the most effective method of communication, other than a face-to-face discussion, is to write a letter. Here are a few guidelines which will make writing to your elected officials even easier.

1. **Write on your personal or business letterhead.** Typed if possible. Address your letter correctly, "Senator \_\_\_\_\_, Representative \_\_\_\_\_, or Mayor \_\_\_\_\_." Include your return address on the letter.
2. **Concentrate on your own representatives.** They are the ones who cast your votes and want to know your views.
3. **Identify your subject.** State the name of the legislation you are writing about. If you know the number of the bill, use it. Speak to only one issue per letter.
4. **State your reason for writing.** Explain how this issue will affect you, your family, your business or your city or state. Don't use form letters which make it appear you are part of an organized pressure campaign. Keep it short and to the point. One or two pages is sufficient.
5. **Don't threaten or ask for the impossible.** Give your legislator time to act by contacting him before or while the proposal is in committee.
6. **Request his/her stand on the issue.** Your political representative appreciates your letter and you will get a response -- particularly if you request his/her stand on the issue.
7. **Follow up on your representatives' vote.** Thank your members, if they please you, on a vote. Everybody appreciates a complimentary letter--and remembers it. On the other hand, if they displease you, that too will be remembered.

The same basic rules apply to email and faxes.