

Tips on Writing or E-Mailing a Member of Congress

Senators and Representatives pay attention to their mail (both regular and e-mail). It's good politics. Responding to mail is crucial to reelection. Members know your vote can be won or lost by their response. The most effective letter is a personal one, not a form letter. The letter should be concise, informed and polite. Some specific tips:

1. Try to stick to one typewritten page; two pages at most. If writing a regular letter, don't write on the back of a page. If writing longhand, take care to write legibly. In e-mail, always use proper net etiquette (avoid using all upper case letters as this connotes shouting, etc.).
2. In a short paragraph, state your purpose. Stick with one subject or issue. Support your position with the rest of the letter.
3. If the subject of your letter is a bill, cite it by name and number.
4. Be factual and support your position with information about how legislation is likely to affect you and others. Avoid emotional, philosophical arguments. Don't spam legislators.
5. If you believe legislation is wrong and should be opposed, say so. Indicate the likely adverse effects, and suggest a different approach.
6. Ask for the legislator's views, but do not demand support. Remember, Senators and Representatives respond to a variety of views, and even if they do not support you position on one issue or bill, they may support it the next time.
7. If writing a letter, make sure your name and address are legible. In e-mail, make sure your name, e-mail address and snail mail address are enclosed. Currently, many legislators have e-mail capability, but can only respond by regular mail.
8. If writing a letter, the suggested style is:

The Honorable _____
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510
Dear Senator _____

The Honorable _____
United States House of Representative
Washington, D.C. 20515
Dear Representative _____

(Begin e-mail by Dear Representative _____ or Dear Senator _____)

Shaping your approach

You can help shape your approach by knowing about the legislators to whom you are writing or e-mailing. Know their committee assignments, interests and backgrounds. If you believe you have something in common, or admire certain of their positions or statements, even on issues unrelated to the subject of your letter or e-mail, say so.