

Communicating with Congress

TIPS FOR E-MAILING CONGRESS

Heightened security measures have dramatically increased the time it takes for a letter sent by post to reach a congressional office. More and more, citizens are using e-mails and faxes to communicate their concerns and increasingly elected officials' offices prefer electronic communications for constituent contact. As a good rule, Members of Congress are far more likely to heed your message if you are one of their constituents.

Purpose of Your E-Mail

- State your purpose for writing in the first sentence of the e-mail.
- If your e-mail pertains to a specific piece of legislation, identify it. And make sure that you are referencing the correct legislation to the correct body of Congress. House bills are H.R.____; Senate bills are designated as S.____.
- Be courteous.
- If appropriate, include personal information about why the issue matters to you.
- Address only one issue in each e-mail.

Addressing Your Correspondence

- **To a Senator**

The Honorable (Full Name)
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator (Last Name)

- **To a Representative**

The Honorable (Full Name)
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms. (Last Name)

Note: When writing to the Chair of a Committee or the Speaker of the House, it is proper to address him/her as:

Dear Mr. Chairman or Madam Chairwoman
Dear Mr. Speaker or Madam Speaker

TIPS FOR PHONING CONGRESS

Telephone calls are usually taken by a staff member. Ask to speak with the aide who handles the issue about which you wish to comment.

After identifying yourself as a constituent, tell the aide you would like to leave a brief message such as: "Please tell Senator/Representative (Name) that I support/oppose (S. ___/ H.R. ___)."

State your reasons for your support or opposition to the bill. Ask for your Senator's or Representative's position on the bill. You may also request a written response to your telephone call.

SUGGESTIONS FOR A PERSONAL VISIT

Meeting with a Member of Congress, or congressional staff, is a very effective way to convey a message about a specific issue or legislative matter. Below are some suggestions to consider when planning a visit to a congressional office.

Plan Your Visit Carefully:

Be clear about what it is you want to achieve; determine in advance which Member or committee staff you need to meet with to achieve your purpose.

Make an Appointment:

When attempting to meet with a member, contact the Appointment Secretary/Scheduler. Explain your purpose and who you represent. It is easier for congressional staff to arrange a meeting if they know what you wish to discuss and your relationship to the area or interests represented by the Member.

Be Prompt and Patient:

When it is time to meet with a Member, be punctual and be patient. It is not uncommon for a Congressman or Congresswoman to be late, or to have a meeting interrupted due to the Member's crowded schedule. If interruptions do occur, be flexible. When the opportunity presents itself, continue your meeting with a Member's staff.

Be Prepared:

Whenever possible, bring to the meeting information and materials supporting your position. Members are required to take positions on many different issues. In some instances, a Member may lack important details about the pros and cons of a particular matter. It is therefore helpful to share with the Member information and examples that demonstrate clearly the impact or benefits associated with a particular issue or piece of legislation.

Be Political:

Members of Congress want to represent the best interest of their district or state. Whenever possible, demonstrate the connection between what you are requesting and the interests of the Member's constituency. If possible, describe for the Member how you or your group can be of assistance to him/her. When it is appropriate, remember to ask for a commitment.

Be Responsive:

Be prepared to answer questions or provide additional information in the event the Member expresses interest or asks questions. Follow up the meeting with a thank-you letter that outlines the different points covered during the meeting and send along any additional information and materials requested.