

Legislative Advocacy: Making Your Voice Heard in the Public Policy Debate:

Contents

Overview	Page 1
Write	Page 2-4
Letters to Congress	
Faxes and E-mail	
Call	Page 4
Visit	Page 5
Use the Media	Page 6
Letters to the Editor	
Frequently Asked Questions	Page 7
Addresses and Phone Numbers	Page 8
Glossary of Congressional Terms	Page 9, 10

Overview

Communicate With Your Legislators

- Show that you are a concerned constituent
- Express your opinion
- Ask for action on a particular issue or piece of legislation

Write

Letters are barometers of constituent opinion.

Writing your legislators is always an effective strategy for advocacy work. A quality letter can make a tremendous impact. When a considerable amount of mail is received on a specific issue, it is brought to the Congressman's attention immediately. Receiving mail just before a vote is most effective. You should try to write at least 4-5 times per year.

Call

Calls present a sense of urgency.

Phoning, like writing, is a common and effective strategy of citizen advocacy. Phone calls are particularly effective in the days preceding a key vote. Phone calls differ from letter because they need to be addressed immediately. In most cases, you will not speak directly with your Senator or Representative. However, as with letters, most offices keep a "count" of constituent responses on a particular issue.

Visit

A visit can be worth several hundred letters.

Visiting a legislator's office either locally or in Washington, D.C. is the most effective way for a citizen to do advocacy. Visits provide an opportunity to build a rapport with the Congressman and his/her staff, a critical and oftentimes ignored component of effective advocacy. In many ways, speaking with a staff person is just as important as speaking with the legislator. Congressional staffers play an important role in legislative decision-making.

Use the Media

It sends off signals...an issue is out there and alive.

Utilizing the media as an advocacy strategy can be extremely effective. Effective uses of the media include Letters to the Editor and Commentaries (Op/Ed). Letters to the Editor and Commentaries are effective because they attract the attention of legislators. Submitting Letters to the Editor and Commentaries provides a way of educating the public on a particular issue as well as getting free press.

Write

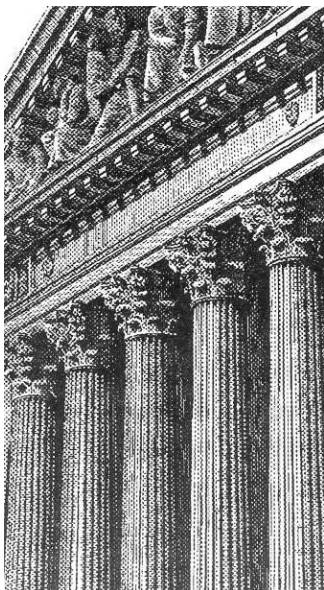
Letters to Congress

“My mailbag is my best “hot line” to the people back home.
On several occasions a single, thoughtful, factually persuasive letter did change my mind...”

–Morris Udall
Former Representative from Arizona

Basics

- Be brief, clear and polite.
- Be legible (hand-written is acceptable).
- Identify your connection to the Sisters of the Holy Cross or your particular Holy Cross- affiliated ministry. This adds strength and influence to the advocacy efforts of other Sisters of the Holy Cross.
- Include your name (legal and religious) and address on the letter.
- Limit your letter to one issue area.
- Ask for a specific action; i.e. a vote on a bill, co-sponsoring legislation, etc.
- Ask for a response.
 - Use your own words and include relevant personal experience.
 - Express appreciation for past efforts, if possible.
 - Express your feelings about the issue in terms of our faith tradition social teachings tradition, CSC priorities/core values.



Sample Letter

The Honorable Tim Roemer
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Roemer:

As a Sister of the Holy Cross and a resident of South Bend, I am very concerned about our nation's support of the School of the Americas. Recent revelations that the Pentagon trained police and military leaders in committing blatant atrocities describe a program that is beyond redemption. According to a recently declassified 1992 Pentagon report, Spanish-language training materials used between 1982 and 1991 advocated murder, kidnaping and other human rights abuses in clear violation of stated U.S. policy. This is clearly contrary to not only U.S. law and the international human rights charter, but it is in direct violation of the teachings of Jesus in the Gospel and the core values of Sisters of the Holy Cross.

In 1995 I had the opportunity to visit El Salvador. The people there have a deep longing for peace, and know from first-hand experience the effects of the terror techniques taught at the School of the Americas. School graduates have been implicated in the 1989 assassination of six Jesuit priests in San Salvador and the 1981 El Mozote massacre, in which more than 700 Salvadoran civilians were killed. Roberto D'Aubisson, the leader of the infamous death squads which killed thousands of Salvadorans in the 1980s, is also among the SOA graduates.

I urge you to vote for the *(name of bill)*, H.R. or S. *(bill number)*, to eliminate funding for the School of the Americas. Closing this school would be an important first step of any U.S. effort to rebuild trust among civilians in El Salvador and to establish a true democratic system of government there.

Please let me know how you intend to vote. Thank you for giving this important issue your consideration.

Sincerely,

Your signature
Your name
Your address

– *Your Affiliation*

– *Your Concern*

– *Our Faith Tradition*

– *Personal Experience*

– *Ask for a Specific Action*

– *Ask for a Response*

Faxes and E-mail

For some people it may be more practical and convenient to consider other forms of written communication. Faxes, and more recently e-mail, are increasingly being used by citizen activists. They can convey a sense of urgency and are particularly useful when you need to send an immediate message. In general, when preparing a fax or e-mail you should follow the same guidelines as those for writing a letter.

Fax

Whenever possible, we will include fax numbers in our action alerts. Many Congressional offices do not publish fax numbers. However, if you call the Washington D.C. offices of your senators and representatives and identify yourself as a constituent, they will give you the number.

It is helpful to address a fax to a particular person, especially when sending it to Senators who have large staffs. When you call to get the fax number ask which staff member works on the issue(s) of concern to you.

E-mail

This is an emerging form of communication for many Congressional and government offices. At this point it is probably too early to assess its effectiveness.

Reminder: Since there is no letterhead or stationery included with e-mail, be sure to clearly identify your name (legal and religious), address, and your affiliation with the Sisters of the Holy Cross within the text of your message.

Call

To reach the Washington D.C. office of any Senator or Representative, call the Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask for your senator's or representative's office. If long distance calls are a concern, you can also call the state/district office of your senator/representative. Consult the local phone book or call directory assistance (1-area code-555-1212) to obtain the number.

Basics

- Identify yourself by your name (legal and religious), hometown and as a Sister of the Holy Cross, if appropriate, to the receptionist and inform him/her that you would like to speak to the appropriate staff person about your issue.
- If you speak with a legislative aide, be sure to write down his/her name for future reference.
- Address only one issue/topic. Identify it by bill number if possible (H.R. # for the House and S.# for the Senate.)
- Be prepared to articulate your position on the issue of concern to you.
- Ask what your legislator's position is and state how you want your legislator to vote on the issue of concern to you.
- Anticipate possible responses, so you can be prepared to ask follow-up questions.
- If the person cannot give you an immediate response, ask him/her to call you back at their earliest convenience. If you do not hear from them in a reasonable amount of time, do a follow-up call.

Visit

Visits are a very personal and effective form of advocacy. Oftentimes, visits are done by a group of concerned constituents.

Basics

- Contact your Congressperson's office for an appointment when he/she is working in your district or when you visit Washington D.C.
- Inform the scheduler about the topic you will discuss and who will be accompanying you.
- Your group should meet prior to the visit. Appoint a spokesperson. This person is responsible for making the group's specific request.
- Confirm the visit by phone the previous day.
- Due to your Congressperson's demanding schedule, you will most likely meet with a legislative aide. Don't underestimate aides. They are often well-informed and knowledgeable on a specific topic.
- Have each person introduce herself. Identify your affiliation with the Sisters of the Holy Cross.
- Come prepared. Know the Congressperson's voting record and his/her position on the issue you will be discussing. Have background information on the issue and know the specific legislation relating to it.
- Have two talks ready: one that is 15 minutes, and another that is 90 seconds. That way, if you meet with your representative in Washington D.C. and he/she gets called out for a vote during your visit, you will still inform him/her of your position.
- Be clear, positive and constructive. Use examples from your personal experience. Don't be afraid to express disagreement if it exists.
- Before leaving, get a definite response regarding his/her position on your issue. If this isn't possible, be clear about when you expect a response and how the group will remain in contact with him/her.
- If the legislator requests information/facts about your issue, be sure to follow-up on this request as soon as possible after the visit.
- Write and mail a short thank you note with a summary of your position.

Use the Media

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the Editor are among the most widely read items in the newspaper. These letters also help editorial writers gauge the interest in the community for particular issues and may stimulate them to take an editorial stance on the issue.

Most congressional offices clip articles daily from local newspapers in their district.

Basics

- Timing is important.
- Keep the letter brief, clear, and to the point.
- When applicable, highlight comments or actions taken by elected officials.
- It helps to give your letter a local slant, and if possible, articulate your experience.
- Make sure any facts and figures you use are accurate.
- Limit the text to one page; short letters are more likely to be printed.
- Keep the letter's tone polite and reasonable.
- Send your letter to the attention of the editorial page editor. Be sure to include your name, address, home and work phone numbers.

Opinion Editorials (Op-Eds)

Op-eds can help raise public awareness on issues, inform elected officials, suggest solutions to important problems, and educate the media. Op-eds differ from letters to the editor in their depth of coverage and number of words. The writer has more space to develop and support his/her position on a particular issue. Op-eds are generally printed opposite the editorial page and are widely read.

Each newspaper has specific guidelines for submitting opinion editorials. Check with your local paper about its procedures.

Basics

- Op-eds must be well-written and to the point, offering a fresh perspective on a timely issue.
- Include the most important arguments about your issue. Use anecdotes and vignettes that put the story in a context to which readers can relate. Offer solutions to the problem and bolster your opinion with solid facts and figures.
- Editors are more apt to run an op-ed piece if it is written by someone well-known in the community or who is a respected authority on the issue. To enhance your chances of publication, co-sign it with an individual whom editors recognize and respect.
- Send your op-ed piece to the editor of the op-ed page with a cover letter explaining why your commentary on the issue is important. Call at least twice to urge the editor to print your piece, reminding him/her of its timeliness.
- If your op-ed piece is rejected, write a shorter version and send it as a letter to the editor.

Frequently Asked Questions

- Q. Where can I find out what district I live in and who my Legislators are?**
A. Call your local Board of Elections or League of Women Voters. If you have access to the internet go to www.senate.gov and www.house.gov. Click on “Member Offices” and enter the information requested to find the name of your representative.
- Q. How can I find out what Committees my Representatives are on?**
A. Sources of information:
District Office of your Representative
Public Library
Senate: Call (202) 224-2115
E-mail addresses for senators: www.senate.gov/contacting/index.cfm
House: Call (202) 225-7000
E-mail addresses for representatives: www.house.gov “Member Offices”
Congregation Justice Committee: Call 219-284-5991 or 5303 or 1-800-879-5621 x 5991 or 5303
- Q. Where can I find up-to-date information on the issues?**
A. The *Congressional Quarterly*, a weekly magazine, can be found in most libraries and gives a summary of what happened in Congress during the past week. Call hotlines that provide information or current legislation (NETWORK hotline: 202-547-5573).
- Q. How do I find out the name and number of a bill?**
A. Call the district office of your Congressperson or check the House/Senate web pages..
- Q. How do I get the status of a bill?**
A. Senate: Library (202) 224-7106
House: Legislative Information: (202) 225-1772
- Q. Do you always need to include the name and number of a bill when writing or calling?**
A. It is recommended that it be included but identifying the issue that concerns you is sufficient if it clearly indicates what legislation you are referring to.
- Q. How do I find out my representative’s view of a specific issue or bill?**
A. Call their office and ask to speak to the staff person who works on that particular issue.
- Q. Is it better to write a letter as an individual or as a group?**
A. Personal and individual letters are usually more effective, but it is important to identify the group you belong to and how many people you represent.
- Q. Is it better to call my representative’s Washington Office or his/her District Office when I want to speak to an issue or a vote that is pending?**
A. It is preferable to call the Washington Office. If you choose to call the District Office, then be sure to ask that your message be communicated to the Washington Office as soon as possible.
- Q. Is it more effective to write your own letter or sign a postcard or a form letter?**
A. It is more effective to write your own letter.

Addresses and Phone Numbers

To The President:

President (name)
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Phone: 202-456-1111
E-mail: president@whitehouse.gov

To a Senator:

The Honorable (name)
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator (name):

Phone: 202-224-3121 (Capitol Switchboard)

To a Representative:

The Honorable (name)
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative (name):

Phone: 202-224-3121 (Capitol Switchboard)

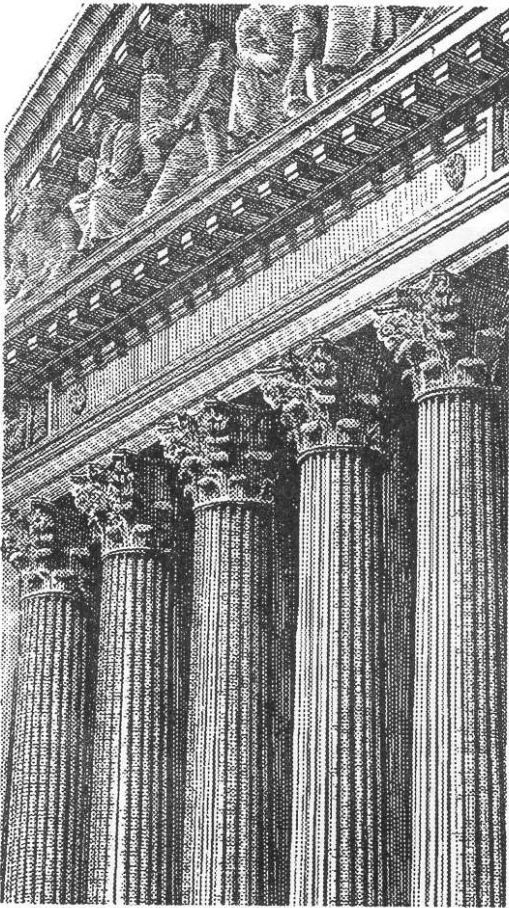
To a Cabinet Member:

The Honorable (name)
Secretary of (name of department)
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary (name):

Phone: 202-456-1414

NOTE: When writing to the Chair of a committee or the Speaker of the House, send letters to the committee office, not the congress member's office. It is proper to address them as: *Dear Mr. Chairman or Madam Chairwoman*, or *Dear Mr. Speaker*.



Glossary of Congressional Terms

Act

The term for legislation once it has passed both houses of Congress and has been signed by the president or after the presidential veto is overridden, thus becoming law.

Amendment

A proposal introduced by a member of Congress to alter language, provisions or stipulations in a bill or another amendment. An amendment is printed, debated and voted upon in the same manner as a bill.

Appropriations Bill

An appropriations bill originates in the House of Representatives. It grants (or distributes) the money approved by the Authorization Bill, but not necessarily the full amount permissible under the authorization.

Authorization Bill

A bill that creates or authorizes federal programs for a certain period of time. It sets out the goals and guidelines of the programs, and may place a ceiling on how much money can be appropriated for programs. Usually programs are authorized before money can be approved for them.

Bills

Most legislative proposals before Congress are in the form of bills and are designated by H.R. in the House of Representatives or S. in the Senate, according to the house in which they originated and by a number assigned to them in the order in which they are introduced during the two-year period of a congressional term.

Budget Authority

Authority provided by law to spend federal money or acquire financial obligations that will result in outlays.

Budget Resolution

An agreement passed by both houses of Congress, but not requiring the President's signature, establishing the congressional budget plan.

Caps

Legal limits on the budget authority and outlays for each year in each of the discretionary appropriations categories.

Chamber

The meeting place for the membership of either the House or the Senate.

Cloture

Process to stop a filibuster in the Senate. Sixty senators must vote for cloture, which ends debate and brings the bill to a vote.

Conference Committee

A temporary committee composed of members from both the House and the Senate whose task is to write a compromise bill after each chamber has passed their bill on the same topic. Both chambers must pass the same bill before it can be sent to the President.

Entitlement

A federal program requiring the payment of benefits to any person or entity that meets the eligibility requirements established by law. Authorizations for entitlement are binding on the federal government, and those eligible for benefits have a recourse to legal action if the obligation is not fulfilled.

Filibuster

An attempt by Senators to prevent a vote by continuous speech-making. In the House, debate is limited. In the Senate, senators can speak as long as they wish. Presently a filibuster can be announced and continuous speech-making does not need to occur.

Fiscal Year

Financial operations of the federal government are carried out in a 12-month period, beginning October 1 and ending on September 30. The fiscal year carries the date of the calendar year in which it ends.

Hearings

An open forum where a committee or subcommittee hears from and questions representatives of the government, industry, academia, business, and the public on topics within the committee's jurisdiction.

House

The House of Representatives, as distinct from the Senate, although each body is a "house" of Congress.

Majority Leader

The majority leader is elected by his/her party colleagues. In the Senate, the majority leader directs the legislative schedule for the chamber. The Senate Majority Leader is also the party's spokesperson and chief strategist. In the House, the majority leader is second to the Speaker in the majority party's leadership and serves as the party's legislative strategist.

Majority Whip

In effect, the assistant majority leader, in either the House or the Senate. His/her job is to help collect the majority party forces in support of party strategy and legislation.

Members of Congress

Consists of Senators and Representatives. Each state has 2 Senators (100 total). The number of Representatives from a state is determined by the population of each state (435 total).

Minority Leader

Floor leader for the minority party in each chamber.

Minority Whip

Performs duties of whip for the minority party.

Outlays

Expenditure or payment made by the federal government to settle obligations. Outlays during a fiscal year may be for payment of obligations incurred in prior years or in the same year.

Pocket Veto

The act of the President in withholding his approval of a bill after Congress has adjourned. When Congress is in session, a bill becomes a law without the president's signature if he does not act upon it within ten days, excluding Sunday, from the time he/she gets it.

Rule

For each bill, the House Rules Committee sets a time limit for debate and decides who will manage the debate and when it will occur. Their decisions are the "rule" on the bill. In the Senate, these matters are handled more informally, with an agreement between majority leaders, minority leaders, sponsors of the bill, and other main players.

Standing Committee

Committees permanently established by the House and Senate rules. The standing committees are legislative committees; legislation may be referred to them and they may report bills and resolutions to their parent chamber.

Sponsors/Co-sponsors

Members of Congress who pledge their support for legislation and put their names on a bill.

Veto

Disapproval by the President of a bill. When the President vetoes a bill, he returns it to the house of origin with his objections. To override the veto, Congress needs a two-thirds majority vote.

The Congregation Justice Committee of the Sisters of the Holy Cross gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the Jesuit Conference Office of Social Ministries and NETWORK: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby for the use of their materials in this Legislative Advocacy Manual.