

Suggestions in writing to elected officials

Communications to elected officials whether by phone, postal letter or email is a measurement of opinion. Letters/emails can make a difference, but not all are influential. Many elected officials differentiate form letters/copied emails from personally written letters and emails. The more influential letters/emails are those that are personal, thoughtful and specific. Taking the time to write it demonstrates that the issue is more important to you than just sending a form letter or a preprinted postcard. Here are some do's and don'ts in writing a convincing letter/email.

Do

- Do spell the elected official's name correctly and use their correct title.
- Do write as an individual. Elected officials pay attention to personal letters from the constituents of the district that elected them. They recognize the time and effort you put into the correspondence. A personal email or letter will receive more attention than a form letter.
- Do write legibly, use complete sentences and avoid using shorthand, acronyms or abbreviations.
- Do limit each letter/email to one subject.
- State your subject in the first paragraph. If you are writing about legislation name the bill by number and/or title.
- Do keep your message simple and limit yourself to one page or less. State whether you are supporting or opposing the issue. Don't make them hunt to find your opinion.
- Do explain how the issue affects you and briefly why you support/oppose it.
- Do say it in your own words. Resist copying a preprinted email or form letter.
- Do include your name, return street address and email address in the closing of your letter/email.
- Do keep all communications respectful.
- Do make your letter/email timely. Send it before the elected official has to decide an issue.
- Do write an elected official when you agree with them. Too often legislators hear only from constituents that are against something.
- Do ask the elected official to do something specific. It is important to ask for a specific action such as, "Please vote for (or against) [number of the bill]"
- Do write each elected official individually. It is best to personalize each communication. However, if time is short, don't hesitate to send the same email/letter text to multiple officials.
- Do spell check and grammar check your correspondence.

Don't

- Don't write letters that demand the elected official's cooperation.
- Don't send form letter, email or postcard.
- Don't threaten, insult, lecture or ridicule the elected official you are asking to take an action.
- Don't adopt a politically partisan tone in your comments.
- Don't become a chronic letter writer. Pick your issues wisely.
- Don't use the elected official's first name, unless you know them personally.
- Don't copy your letter to other elected officials; write each one whenever possible.
- Don't allege motives or question the honesty of others. Stick to explaining your views.

How to address your letter/email correctly:

Always address an email or letter to an elected official as “The Honorable ...”

Example:

March 23, 2009

The Honorable Jane Doe

Name of office held (Governor, US Senator, Congressman, State Senator, Regent etc.)

Institution (State of Nebraska, U.S. Senate, U.S. Congress, Nebr. Legislature, Board of Regents, etc.)

Street address

City, State, Zip

RE: (Name the subject or name of legislative bill and number)

Dear Governor Doe:

I write to encourage you to oppose/support _____.

This issue is important to me because ...

Sincerely,
John Q. Citizen
Street Address
City, State, zip
Email address