



# ADVOCATING 101

## POLITICAL ADVOCATING

Effecting change often requires us to tell our leadership how we feel. The White House and members of Congress listen to their constituents and care about constituent opinions. But to be effective, you must properly communicate your point. Elected officials & their staff are people too, and as you would react negatively to someone who sent you an angry or threatening letter, so do they. So, follow some guidelines that are founded on civility and common sense:

### THE BEST COMMUNICATION: A PERSONAL VISIT

The most effective way of communicating with a legislator is to personally meet with them or their staff. Unless you are planning a trip to Washington, DC, this means visiting their local office. Don't expect the legislator to be in their local office if Congress is in session on the date of your visit. If you have the opportunity, note when Congress is in recess and make a point to visit the legislator's district office then. You also can see if your representative and senators have on their Web sites a listing of their district offices (most do) and whether they list times when they will be there. You increase the chance of actually meeting the legislator by visiting at this time.

If you meet the legislator either in the Washington or local office, send them a thank you card after the meeting. In the card or letter state that you would like to meet again to tell them more about your profession and the issues about which you are concerned. Try to attend any social gathering which your elected official may attend; this is a good way to nurture the friendship.

### TELEPHONE CALLS

Unless you have established a working relationship with a legislator or one of their staff members, telephone calls are best limited to times when a bill is coming up for a vote and you want to urge the legislator to vote for or against it. If you have established a working relationship with the legislator or one of their staff members, then call them to discuss it. But, keep in mind you may not be able to talk with the legislator personally. When in

It is very important to remember that all contacts with elected officials must be constructive even if their opinions contrast with your own or those of your organization. It's one thing to disagree with someone, it's another thing to be a jerk about it . . . be respectful, courteous, and professional.

Washington, elected officials have hectic schedules and a good part of their day is spent in committee meetings or on the floor of the House or Senate. Instead of calling your legislators' Washington office consider calling a local district office instead—district offices tend not to get swamped with phone calls as do Capitol offices.

If this is your first call to a congressional office, you'll talk with a staff member. The first thing you need to do is state your name and the fact that you are a constituent of the legislator. Then briefly state the nature of your call, i.e., urging the legislator to support or oppose a particular piece of legislation:

*"Hello, my name is Sally Smith and I am a constituent of (name of senator or representative). I am calling today to urge them to support/oppose HR 1234. Thank you."*

These types of calls are very important to legislators and the vast majority keep track of these calls.

## LETTERS, FAXES & E-MAILS

Unless you have a personal, first-name relationship with a member of Congress or one of their staff members, the way you guarantee that your communication will be effective is to make sure the receiving office instantly can identify you as a constituent. If they can't, there is an excellent chance your communication will be discarded without being read.

When writing a member of Congress it's important to use the proper salutation. For senators it's "Dear Senator" (and the senator's last name: Dear Senator Lansing:). For members of the House of Representatives, the way to address female members of the House is "Congresswoman" and male members is "Congressman" (Dear Congresswoman Munster: / Dear Congressman Calumet:). However, using "Dear Representative" (Dear Representative Hammond:) is acceptable.

If you are sending a letter, fax or e-mail already prepared for you, take a minute to put the message into your own words. And remember, courteously written communications are more likely to be read and have positive impact than a page or two of ravings and rantings.

## SAMPLE LETTER TO ELECTED OFFICIAL

Go to the next page to view a sample letter.

## KEY POINTS

- Be courteous and respectful in all communications. Don't use threats.
- Know your issue! Request documents from your organization that provide background information on the issue and the elected official you wish to contact. This information can be particularly helpful in drafting letters. If you are doing this on your own, do your homework to be knowledgeable in your communication.
- Keep your comments brief, pertinent, and factual. Cover only one issue per letter. Explain how the issue would affect you and/or your organization.
- Identify the subject in the first paragraph. If you are writing in reference to a particular bill, refer to the measure's House or Senate bill number and/or title, if possible.
- Be constructive, not negative.
- If you support a particular bill, say so. If you are writing in opposition to legislation, include specific examples of how the measure would adversely affect you and suggest an alternative approach if possible.
- Avoid stereotyped phrases, jargon, and sentences that give the appearance of form letters.
- Also, don't forget that elected officials like to be told when they've done something right! Send them a congratulatory note when they do something that merits approval.

## RESOURCES ON THE WEB:

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee [AIPAC]  
United States Congress  
Florida Congress



The Jewish Federation  
OF SARASOTA-MANATEE

Klingenstein Jewish Center  
580 McIntosh Rd., Sarasota, FL 34232

**JFEDSRQ.org**

Mr. Your Name  
123 Main Street  
Sarasota, FL 34236

Senator John Doe  
555 Hart-Russell Senate Office Bldg.  
Washington D.C. 20510

August 17, 2017

Dear Senator John Doe,

Today we are watching a deadly scenario unfolding in real time in the Middle East. The ISIS Terrorist Group has already established an Islamic State in Syria and Iraq and is rapidly marching forward to enlarge their caliphate ruled by Sharia Law. Their brutality is limitless, as witnessed by the recent brutality against a Jordanian pilot and the public beheadings of Steven Sotloff, James Foley, Peter Kassig, Haruna Yukawa, Kenji Goto and too many others to name. Americans need to become aware of the infinite dangers this presents.

9/11 was only one of the first wake-up calls that most of us have ignored. Will we heed this imminent danger by understanding the enemy while there is still time? We cannot just sit on the sidelines anymore. We must sound the alarm.

Please, Mr. Senator, and all elected officials, speak out and work with our global partners to address ominous diabolical threat to our freedoms that we face today.

Respectfully,

*Your Signature*