

Writing Effective Letters to Elected Officials

Writing a letter to your elected officials is one of the easiest ways of conveying your thoughts and concerns on an issue. Taking five minutes to write a letter **does** make a difference.

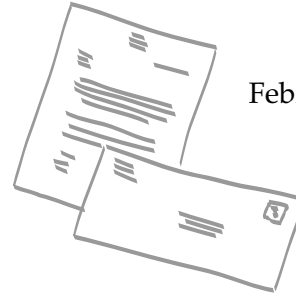
Letters to your own legislator are especially important. When an elected official receives numerous letters on a specific issue, it does influence his or her vote. Some tips for writing a letter to an elected official follow:

- **Use your own stationery.** A neatly typed or legibly handwritten letter on your own stationery is best.
- **Write your own thoughts and words.** Form letters or preprinted postcards are not as impressive as an original letter. Write about your personal experience and how the issue affects you. Be brief and not overly dramatic.
- **Be clear on your position.** Clearly state your position on the issue. Show your knowledge in a concise format. Be direct and firm, but not hostile.
- **Identify yourself.** If you have met the legislator before, personalize the letter by noting briefly when and where that occurred so he or she can place a face with your name.
- **Address elected officials properly.** A member of the House of Representatives is, "The Honorable Jane Doe," a senator is, "The Honorable John Smith."
- **Be concise.** Write about only one issue in your letter. A one page letter is more likely to be read than a longer one.
- **Mention legislation.** If appropriate, cite a specific bill number and name or its principle sponsors. If the bill is not well known, a short summary of the bill may be necessary.
- **Request a specific action.** State exactly what you want the elected official to do. If appropriate, ask the legislator to vote for a particular bill or amendment, request a hearing or co-sponsor a bill.
- **Ask for a reply.** If you ask a question or request something, ask the legislator for a reply explaining his or her position on the issue.
- **Include a return address in your letter.**
- **Mail the letter.** Particularly for local elected officials, mail the letter directly to where the legislative session is held. If the legislature is not in session, send the letter to the legislator's home office address.
- **Write a follow-up letter.** If you asked for a reply and did not receive one, write another letter asking for a response. If the legislator complied with your request (e.g., voted favorably for a

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bill), send a thank you note. It will be a refreshing change to most letters they receive.

Following are a couple of sample letters. Please do not feel confined by their styles; the most effective style is to use your own words and experiences.



February 26, 1997

The Honorable John Q. Taxdollars
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Taxdollars,

I live near a wonderful creek and marsh in Oregon City. Thanks to current federal and state wetlands laws, I enjoy watching the wildlife, such as marsh hawks, red-wing blackbirds and Pacific tree frogs. I also enjoy watching the children who excitedly explore the area. Living near this beautiful place has increased the value of my property and enriched my family's lives.

In addition to providing fish and wildlife habitat, the marsh controls storm water runoff in the area, reduces sedimentation in the creek, and aids in improving the quality of the water by removing pollutants which reduces the cost for water treatment facilities. Around the nation, streams and their adjacent wetlands perform these vital functions, support the sports fishing industry and other recreational opportunities, and contribute to our drinking water supply. These many reasons are why it is critical to protect wetlands, streams and other natural resources by keeping or improving our laws, not eliminating them.

I strongly urge you to vote against Senate Bill 851, the Wetlands Reform Act of 1997. I am very concerned about this bill which is sponsored by Senators Johnston and Faircloth. This bill would reduce or eliminate most wetlands from protection by the federal government. Senate Bill 851 alters the definition of wetlands which would wipe out 50 -75% of existing wetlands. As the bill provides numerous loopholes for special interests, millions more acres of wetlands would be exempt from regulations and not protected.

Scientists have determined that we have destroyed or altered approximately 50% of the wetlands in the United States. We need clean water to sustain our lives. It is very important that you oppose Senate Bill 851. I look forward to a reply regarding your position and vote on this issue.

Sincerely,

Juli Speakout
1000 Cleanwater Lane
Oregon City, Oregon 97321
503-600-001

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HOOD RIVER COUNTY CITIZENS IN ACTION
100 West Cherry Tree Drive
Hood River, Oregon 97031
503/541-3210

February 26, 1997

The Honorable Marsha Burlap
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Representative Burlap:

As you know from having met with us on several occasions over the years (we particularly appreciated your serving as keynote speaker at our awards banquet last August), Hood River County Citizens In Action is a group that assists individuals in this county faced with problems that are too large to solve themselves.

We are writing you to request your support of House Bill 97-22 when it comes before you in the Agriculture Committee and later on the House floor.

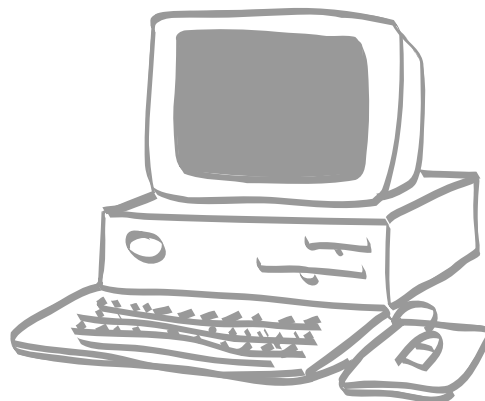
This bill expands the scope of the Migrant Labor Camp Law to include small migrant camps under minimal health, sanitation and safety standards to be enforced by county health departments. It is a good bill: one which neither places undue burden on the farmers who run the camps nor on the health departments who will enforce the new standards. Indeed, our local health department has advised us that enforcing the new law would probably cost them less money and time than caring for the children in the camps who become ill due to a lack of proper sanitation facilities.

This bill has widespread support throughout Hood River County, the 33rd District and all of Oregon. Without its protection, we have been informed that it is just a matter of time before the State's inattention to this problem will result in an outbreak of cholera!

Please do not let this happen! Let us know how we can be of assistance to you in securing passage of this critical legislation.

Sincerely yours,

Frederick Cares
800 Pear Tree Lane
Hood River, Oregon 97031



Writing Effective Letters to the Editor of a Newspaper

The editorial page is one of the most important sections of any newspaper. More people read the “Letters to the Editor” section than many other portions of the newspaper. This is an ideal forum for conveying your message about environmental issues.

Editors view this section of the paper differently, depending upon the circulation size of the newspaper. Some see the “Letters to the Editor” as a community bulletin board where a variety of opinions are printed. For a widely circulated newspaper, hundreds of letters arrive each day. Editors of these newspapers look for criticism, praise or feedback on the stories and columns that have recently appeared. They are also looking for ideas and facts. By providing your editor with information on issues important to you, you help them to inform readers, and you influence others. Editors are not required to print your letters, but they usually feel responsible for equitably and accurately depicting all sides of an issue.

Editorials educate the readers on important topics of the day, shape public attitudes, affect elected officials, and influence key policy decisions at the local, state and national levels. A legislator is very sensitive to the editorial opinion published in papers in his or her jurisdiction. The editorial page of your community or regional paper is a valuable resource in the pursuit to protect our environment.

Large papers, like *The Oregonian*, have an editorial board. Each of the editors on the board may develop specialties or a group of topics about which he or she writes. Editorial writers generally have two charges: to lead or reflect opinion on local or state issues, and to add to the body of opinion on national and international issues. Whether you wish to discuss a local issue or a global one, the editorial writers should be interested in your viewpoint. The following are some suggestions for writing a letter to the editor of your newspaper.

- **Learn the newspaper’s style.** Read several days worth of “Letters to the Editor” in the paper in order to gain a sense of the style of letters printed. Determine the newspaper’s audience and its circulation size.
- **Use your own words.** Don’t use a form letter. Let your personality and thoughts show by being serious, humorous or ironic, but don’t be nasty or offensive. A hint of restrained anger is often more effective than strident outrage. Besides, creative letters using humor or irony will have a more lasting impression on other readers.
- **Localize your letter.** Explain how the issue affects you or your area.
- **Know your subject.** Be sure you know your subject or issue if you are going to criticize or attack someone or something. Use facts, if necessary, and take the time to do research.
- **Offer a solution.** Whether stating a specific or general approach to an issue, solutions are always a more intelligent way to follow up criticism.
- **Identify the responsible person in your letter.** Name a decision-maker, elected official or

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person who can control or influence the issue. If you want the public to contact a specific legislator, include his or her phone number, e-mail or address in the letter.

- **Keep it brief.** Check the “Letters to the Editor” section of the newspaper for word limit or other instructions. (Some editors will edit letters for readability and length.) A letter of less than 250 words has a better chance of being printed than a longer one, and more readers will read a shorter letter. In general, write no more than four to six paragraphs, with each paragraph consisting of two to three sentences. Limit the number of points you make and stick to the subject.
- **Type your letter.** If not possible, legibly handwrite your letter.
- **Fax your letter to the editor.** If the newspaper is circulated daily, fax your letter so it will get there quicker and possibly be printed faster.
- **Sign your letter.** Most editors will not accept a letter unless it is signed by the author.
- **Include your address and daytime phone number.** Most editors will not accept a letter unless these are included. Someone from the newspaper may call you to verify facts and confirm that you are the author.
- **Watch the newspaper for your letter.** If it does not show up within a few days or in the next issue, call the editor’s office to politely ask about the letter. They may offer an explanation or tips to help you get published the next time you submit a letter.

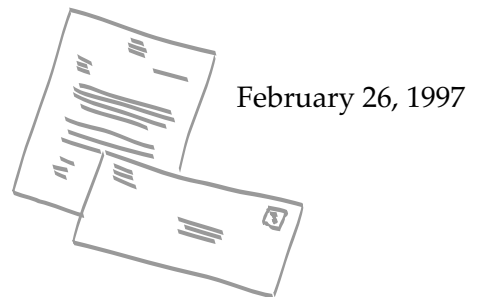
Following are a couple of sample letters to the editor. Please do not feel confined by their styles; the most effective style is to use your own words and experiences.

Editor
The Oregonian
1320 SW Broadway
Portland, Oregon 97201

Dear Editor:

The Oregonian's February 24th summary of the current state legislative session was a good start at covering an important issue before the legislature in Salem. Our state representatives are trying to turn back the clock on Oregon’s water quality standards. They also want to allow agricultural and cattle businesses to extract more water from Oregon streams—even streams that already lack enough water to support fish.

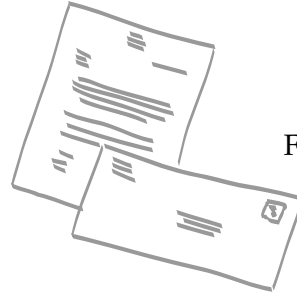
We need stronger, not weaker, water protection standards in Oregon. According to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, more than 6,000 miles of Oregon’s rivers and streams are so badly polluted that the streams cannot safely support fishing or swimming. Pollution has also caused seasonal fishing or swimming restrictions in an additional 8,700 miles of Oregon’s waterways. Nearly 4 out of 5 Oregonians depend on streams or rivers to provide their drinking water. What will we do if we contaminate our drinking water sources?



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Representative Hydro should vigorously oppose any effort to reverse Oregon's water quality and quantity standards. And if she will not, Oregonians must urge Governor Kitzhaber to veto this type of regressive legislation.

Juli Speakout
1000 Cleanwater Lane
Portland, Oregon 97200
503-600-0001



February 28, 1997

Editor
The Oregonian
1320 SW Broadway
Portland, Oregon 97201

To the Editor:

I was encouraged by the February 20th *Oregonian* article, "Endangered Species, Not for Long?". The Endangered Species Conservation and Management Act (ESCMA), which was recently funded for ten years and approved by Congress, is the icing on the cake for preserving and protecting America's natural treasures. This act is a bipartisan effort to be responsible land stewards and ensure that our children and generations to follow will experience the wonders of America's natural resources. It was refreshing to see that legislators did not let corporate profits and industry greed betray the legacy of the original Endangered Species Act. As the article pointed out, there was much effort to defeat the passage of this important legislation.

Under the ESCMA, the best available scientific evidence will be used to determine which species are in danger of extinction. The goals are to protect these species and their habitats, as well as facilitate their recovery. Since the original Endangered Species Act in 1973, eight species have been recovered and removed from the endangered list, including our national symbol, the Bald Eagle. Many others are approaching recovery with nearly 50% of all species now listed at a point of stable or improving condition. The approved ESCMA will ensure a solid road to recovery for these species.

The ESCMA also supports research into new medicinal discoveries and cures from protected plant species. Half the prescription drugs in use today are derived from natural sources and only 5% of the world's plant species have been studied for their medicinal value. The Endangered Species Acts are not just about protecting plant and animal species and habitats; ultimately they are about saving and protecting people.

Henri Species
1000 Salmon Street
Portland, Oregon 97201
503-699-9991

Placing a Phone Call to an Elected Official

As a citizen, you have the right to express your opinion to your elected official. When the phone rings in our legislator's office, they are obligated to answer. When many calls come in regarding a specific issue, the elected official is compelled to notice and hopefully take action. Legislators work to serve the people. They cannot do their jobs effectively if they do not hear the opinions and interests of the people, especially the citizens of their districts. The following are some recommendations for placing phone calls to your elected officials.

- **Prepare.** Have an outline or a mini-script of what you intend to discuss with the legislator. If necessary, do research so that you know the subject and its relevancy to current legislation.
- **Identify yourself** by giving your name and your address.
- **Relax.** If you are nervous, relax and treat the phone call like a normal telephone conversation. Do not read verbatim from a prepared script, but speak coherently and slowly.
- **Be brief.** Clearly and concisely state your position and make your point. Limit your call to one issue. Make separate phone calls for other issues.
- **Identify the legislation.** Make sure you identify the legislation you are discussing by name and number, or by its sponsors. If the legislator or staff person is not familiar with the legislation, provide him or her with a brief summary.
- **Ask for a viewpoint and a vote.** Find out the legislator's views on the legislation, and ask for a commitment to vote for or against the legislation.
- **Don't argue.** It is ineffective to engage in an argument with the legislator or staff person about the issue. You will be more likely to get your message across by keeping your cool, and your conversation clear and succinct. Be courteous, direct and fair.
- **Don't get discouraged.** Don't give up if you get a busy signal. This simply means that others are getting through with a message as well. (You can always send a fax if you can't get through right away). Also, don't be discouraged if you speak with a staff person. Most legislative aides are very reliable in relaying messages, and are knowledgeable about the issues. Conduct the conversation as you would with the legislator.
- **Follow up.** Send a thank you note to the legislator or staff person. Although listening to citizen views is part of their jobs, this is a courtesy and a great opportunity to briefly restate your position in writing.
- **Be positive.** Positive phone calls to your legislator can be very helpful. If your official has a good environmental record or has recently supported pro-environmental legislation, a commendation is always received favorably.

Tips for Calling a Talk Radio Program

Talk radio programs are great formats for presenting your viewpoints on an issue and possibly influencing listeners and decision makers. Over 90% of talk radio listeners do not call in which leads to discussions that do not always represent all sides of an issue. Talk radio programs are a prime opportunity to speak out and share our knowledge, experiences, and concerns on a specific issue. Following are some tips when calling a talk radio program.

- **Discuss issues about which you feel strongly, but always maintain a respectful tone.** Don't take anything personally. Don't start an argument or become nasty and mean. If it comes to that, let the other side come across as mean.
- **Cite the facts.** Make sure you have done your research or are knowledgeable about the issue before discussing it on a talk radio program. Acknowledge what you do not know and don't state facts you cannot support.
- **Focus on the issue, the facts and the problems.** Don't focus on personalities or criticize the concerns of others.
- **Identify decision-makers who are part of the issue.** Don't attack the person, but state who is pushing for or against legislation.
- **Don't let the talk show host distract you** or take you down a path of conversation irrelevant to the subject.



Meeting with your Elected Official

Meeting with an elected official is simply the face-to-face version of writing a letter or having a telephone conversation. Most legislators want to meet with citizens from their districts to hear their concerns and recommendations. You only have to be passionate about an issue to get your message across, not an expert lobbyist. Because you hold the power of the vote, your opinions carry more weight than any number of paid lobbyists. Don't be afraid to lobby; it is simply expressing your opinion and trying to convince someone that your view is the correct one.

It may be difficult to set up a meeting during the hectic legislative session, but usually the legislator will take the time if you are willing to travel to Salem or Washington D.C.. Often you can arrange a meeting while he or she is home as legislators usually schedule time in their districts around holidays or during recesses. Remember that you have several elected officials at the federal, state and local levels with different decision-making authority. If appropriate, you should contact all of them if they can support your environmental issue.

Arranging the Meeting...

- **Call your legislator's office and make an appointment.** Ask to speak with the appointments secretary or scheduler.
- **Identify yourself as a constituent of the legislator,** stating where you live.
- **Briefly explain which issue you would like to discuss** with the legislator.
- **Request a 30 minute meeting with the elected official.** You might be given less time, but it doesn't hurt to ask for 30 minutes.
- **If the legislator is unavailable,** request a meeting with a legislative aide or other staff person who is responsible for or knowledgeable about your environmental issue.
- **Send a note or fax to confirm the appointment.** Include the time, date and location of the appointment, as well as your name, address, and daytime phone number.

Preparing for the Meeting...

- **Gather a small group,** if possible, (three is optimum) to accompany you during the meeting. Bring different members of the community, such as a business owner, teacher, doctor, scientist, homemaker, etc. If you are representing a larger group or organization, convey that to the legislator.
- **Determine the message you wish to convey** before meeting with the legislator. If in a group, divide up the tasks of who is the main spokesperson, and who will answer questions on specific topics. Also, assign someone to take notes and to write the follow-up letter. Include brief personal stories or experiences which demonstrate why this issue is important to you or the group. Finally, keep your message brief and clear so that your legislator understands the issue.

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- **List all arguments for and against the issue and develop responses.** This will avoid being put on the spot when the legislator disagrees with your argument.
- **Prepare your message in a letter or fact sheet** to leave with the legislator. Have other voters or organizations prepare letters of endorsement or other supportive materials. If you wish to convey amendments or revisions to legislation, provide your edited version of the bill. Be brief; if you bury them in paper, they may not read it!
- **Familiarize yourself with the legislator's voting record and history.** This will help you to relate and determine which arguments will be most effective (e.g., economic, environmental, religious, etc.).
- **Role play your presentation** with others who can provide feedback. Practice until you are confident and know the information or message, but do not memorize it. Make sure the information you are presenting is limited enough to allow time for questions and discussion.

During the Meeting...

- **Be on time.** Your legislator has a full schedule. Sometimes elected officials may not be on time due to meetings or hearings. Be patient and flexible. If the legislator must leave early, ask to continue the discussion with a staff person.
- **Dress nicely.** Initial impressions are important in this setting and a good one can only help your message.
- **Relax.** Do not feel that you need to be an expert. All that matters is that you are an intelligent citizen with voting power. Your best tool will be to show how genuine your concern is for the issue.
- **Introduce yourself** and everyone in your group, and identify your organization.
- **Make eye contact.** This shows confidence. Speak with authority and remember that your legislator (or the staff person) is a person too.
- **Begin with a compliment,** such as stating how good his or her environmental voting record is. If you can't do that, at least begin by thanking the legislator for taking the time to meet with you.
- **Make your opening remarks a brief and clear description of the issue.** State your position on it and what you want the elected official to do. If legislation is involved, state the bill number, name and sponsors.
- **Watch body language** as it can often reveal more than the discussion.
- **If you lose your train of thought or get flustered,** pull out your fact sheet to refresh your mind or let another member of the group pick up the discussion.
- **After presenting your message, let the legislator respond.** Listen carefully. Have another

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member take notes so you can focus on what the legislator is saying.

- **Answer the legislator's questions as best you can.** Don't make up answers. Acknowledge what you do not know. Make a note of the questions you could not answer and tell the legislator you will follow-up with answers.
- **Keep the discussion focused on the message you are there to convey.** If the discussion gets off course, steer it back to the issue.
- **Be firm about your position, but don't try to change the legislator's mind.** Be courteous, direct and fair. Ensure that no personal remarks are made. If you are not seeing eye-to-eye with the legislator and are frustrated, move on to another part of the issue or politely end the meeting. It is important not to alienate the legislator since you may need his or her support on another issue.
- **Ask for your legislator's support** by speaking out on the floor, or voting for or against the bill, unless he or she is clearly opposed to the issue.
- **Remember to leave the legislator and the staff a copy of your fact sheets,** letters or other information.
- **Thank the legislator or staff member for his or her time,** even if no agreement was reached on the issue.

After the Meeting...

- **Immediately take notes regarding the main points of discussion,** the legislator's remarks, any unanswered questions, etc.
- **Complete your research** to find information for unanswered questions.
- **Promptly follow up with a thank you letter.** Use this to restate your key points, respond to outstanding questions, and reiterate any commitments the legislator made. The letter should be signed by all parties who attended the meeting, as well as any interested parties who could not attend.



Attending Town Meetings

A large and well-informed turnout at a town hall meeting or a community forum is an extremely effective way to send a strong message to your congressperson, the media and the general public (via the media). If your lawmaker is supportive of your issue, a show of support helps to solidify his or her position.

Sometimes lawmakers participate in events that are not open to the public except by invitation. If you know of an event that you would like to attend, but it is not open to the public, call the congressperson's office and ask if you can attend.

In general, when attending and speaking at town meetings, conduct yourself as you would when testifying at a hearing or meeting with your elected officials.

Before the Town Meeting...

- **Find out the congressperson's schedule.** Newspapers often publish these dates, or sometimes the lawmaker will send out a schedule to voters in his or her district. The most reliable way to find the schedule is to call the district office.
- **Try to recruit several others to attend the meeting with you.** Inform them of the date, time, address and nature of the meeting. If you have the time and resources, provide background information, a map to the site, salient points and sample questions.
- **Think about how the congressperson will likely respond to your questions,** and prepare in advance with answers and follow-up questions.

At the Town Meeting...

- **Keep your comments brief,** clear and to the point.



Tips on Testifying

This is the decade of public involvement, especially at the local level. If a bill or action affects you or your organization, the process to get your message heard is easier and more important than ever.

The majority of bills (especially at the state and federal level) are referred to committees. Public testimony is generally taken at the committee level during public hearings. At the local level, there may be a public hearing in front of a committee (e.g., Metro), or there may be a hearing in front of a council (e.g., at the city level) where the issue is on the agenda with other non-related issues. Notices of hearings or requests are usually found in newspapers, posted at the agency's office, or sent to affected parties or neighbors. You can be placed on a mailing list to receive hearing agendas. Remember that schedules can change on the day of the hearing, so verify with the committee or agency staff prior to attending the hearing.

In addition to sending your comments by mail, it is important to attend hearings for the following reasons. Verbal testimony has an emotional impact, especially on elected officials who may not have time to read the written record. Hearings are often covered by news reporters, and thus are opportunities to get your message out to the public, beyond just the agency or committee. The fact that you made the effort to come out in person sends an important message to the agency and the public regarding your level of commitment to the issue. Agencies—always under pressure to do the wrong thing—appreciate some support to do the right thing.

The following are some tips to testifying effectively:

- **Prepare.** Usually there is a time limit, such as three minutes at local hearings. Prepare your presentation to include two or three key points that can be made within the time limit. Practice presenting your testimony. Prepare a written version to submit at the hearing.
- **Arrive early.** If you do not wish to wait, be sure to show up a half hour early to complete and turn in a sign-up card. If you do not arrive early, prepare for a long wait if it is a contentious issue.
- **Dress appropriately.** A good impression can only help your message.
- **Listen to other testimony.** Make sure you do not repeat verbatim what a previous speaker has presented, although you can offer support for a point or position previously stated.
- **Identify yourself.** Begin by giving your name, and usually, your full address. It is better to testify as a private citizen, but if you are testifying for a special interest group, state the name of the organization or group, briefly describe the group's mission, and state how many members it has.
- **Clearly state your position.** Give a clear and concise description of your position on the issue or the bill.

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- **Personalize your testimony.** Use your own words and describe personal experiences without being melodramatic. Formulated testimony is not as impressive and eloquent as your own words. Describe or show through pictures how the issue affects you.
- **Don't read your testimony.** The committee or council will listen to and appreciate your testimony more if you tell it from the heart and don't read a script.
- **Request action.** State exactly what you would like the committee or sponsor to do.
- **Offer solutions.** Whether stating a specific or general approach to an issue, solutions or feasible alternatives are always well received. If you wish to convey amendments or revisions to legislation, provide your edited version of the bill.
- **Thank the committee.** Close your presentation by thanking the committee or council for taking the time to listen to your viewpoint.
- **Offer to answer any questions.** It is usually acceptable for legislators to interrupt the presenter to ask questions. Answer all questions honestly. If you do not know the answer, say so and, if possible, defer the question to another witness who has the information.
- **Submit your testimony in written format,** along with any other supporting information, to the committee or council before you leave.



How the Government Works

Federal *

The federal government has three branches: legislative, executive and judicial—each of which limits the power of the others. Congress (the legislative branch) drafts and votes on bills which become laws if approved by the President. The President (the executive branch) can sign or veto laws. The Federal Court System (the judicial branch), with the Supreme Court at the top, interprets federal laws.

The Legislative Branch

The Congress consists of 435 members of the House of Representatives and 100 members of the Senate. House members are elected by voting citizens in specified districts and serve two year terms. The districts are redrawn every 10 years after the national census. Citizens in each state elect two Senators who serve six year terms. Senators and House members have their own staffs who do research, communicate with constituents, and provide campaign support.

Most work related to amending, changing or creating bills is completed in Standing Committees. The House has 22 committees and the Senate has 16. Both review information, edit and rewrite bills. Each committee has its own staff who are more knowledgeable about the committee issues than are the Senate or House members. Most House and Senate members prefer to sit on committees which affect their state or district (such as forestry for Oregon). The top Democrats and Republicans (party leadership) decide who is assigned to each committee. Only House members may initiate bills to change taxes. The Senate has sole authority to approve presidential appointees, such as ambassadors, federal judges and Supreme Court justices.

Both the Senate and House have majority and minority leaders and whips (deputy leaders). The Speaker of the House and the Senate Majority Leader are chosen from the majority party. Most argue that these positions have roughly the same influence as the president. The two majority leaders coordinate and arrange each chamber's legislative agenda. The two party system (Republicans and Democrats) prohibits smaller or minor groups from holding these influential positions.

The Executive Branch

The president is head of the Executive Branch, signs laws, and is the Commander-in-Chief of the nation's armed forces. The vice president presides over the Senate (but can only vote to break a tie), serves as the president's emissary, and assumes the presidency if the president dies or becomes incapacitated. The vice president is chosen by the president prior to the election. The president and vice president are elected for four year terms with a limit of two terms.

Fourteen departments complete most of the work in the Executive Branch with the secretaries of the departments forming the Cabinet (e.g., Secretary of State, Secretary of Health and Human Services, etc.). The president's Executive Staff completes tasks such as writing speeches, arranging schedules and meetings, and researching information. Independent regulatory agencies, such as the Environmental Protection Agency, enforce laws outside the range of government departments.

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The Judicial Branch

The Supreme Court has nine justices which are appointed by the president for life (after being confirmed by the Senate). The Supreme Court hears and decides on cases involving constitutional issues. In theory, the Supreme Court is the protector of civil liberties and rights as stated in the Bill of Rights. The Supreme Court hears cases from federal appellate courts or state supreme courts, but only 5% of all requested cases are heard by them.

* Source: *Let's Go: Washington, D.C.*, 1996, Cambridge, MA.

State of Oregon +

The Oregon Legislature is comprised of the Senate and the House of Representatives, with thirty and sixty members respectively. The terms for each are staggered with half elected every two years. The legislature begins on the second Monday in January during odd numbered years and runs for approximately six months, although there is no limit on the length. Standing committees by subject areas are organized at the beginning of each legislative session. The presiding officer (Speaker of the House or President of the Senate) appoints the committee members and designates the chair and vice-chair. Each legislator serves on one or more committees (e.g., Education, Agriculture, Labor, etc.).

An idea to change, amend or create a new law is presented to a legislator who decides to sponsor it and introduce it to the legislature. The bill receives its first reading and the presiding officer refers the bill to a committee. The committee studies the bill information, holds public hearings, and completes a report which includes its recommendation. (All committee action is open to the public.) The bill then goes for its second and third readings, and finally... for a vote. The bill must be approved by both the Senate and House and signed by the governor before becoming law.

Persons who work to influence legislation (lobbyists) must register with the State of Oregon if they lobby more than 16 hours or spend more than \$50 during any calendar quarter. Lobbying is generally defined as "influencing or attempting to influence legislative action." Very few citizens who are **not** paid to lobby will need to register. Contact the Office of Government Standards and Practices for more information.

+Source: *How an Idea Becomes a Law*, Oregon Legislative Information Systems, May 16, 1996.

CONSERVATION ACTIVIST'S TOOLKIT

Regional Government — Metro*

Metro is the regional government that serves 1.3 million people who live in Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington counties and the 24 cities in the Portland metropolitan area. Metro's primary mission is to manage growth in the region.

Metro was formed in 1979 when voters of the region approved the transition from an appointed council of governments (Columbia Region Association of Governments — CRAG) to an elected body. In 1992 voters adopted a home-rule charter that established Metro as having primary responsibility for regional land-use and transportation planning. The charter also outlines Metro's other responsibilities, such as solid waste disposal; operation of arts and cultural facilities, parks and the zoo; and any other functions assigned to Metro by the voters.

Metro officials are directly elected by voters within the Metro boundary and are directly accountable to the citizens of the region. The Executive Officer oversees the staff and programs at Metro and prepares an annual budget for Metro Council approval. The Council sets policy direction, enacts legislation and approves the budget. Metro also has an auditor who is elected regionwide.

Metro provides regional services that guide growth and create livable communities. Metro is working to ensure that people in the region have access to nature; clean air and water; the ability to get around the region; safe and stable neighborhoods; resources for future generations; and a strong regional economy.

Local decisions can have wide ranging effects — especially when it comes to land use and transportation. For these reasons, Metro was given the responsibility of providing long-range regional growth management and transportation planning in the tri-county metropolitan area. A traffic problem in Beaverton is a traffic problem in Portland; westside light rail will improve eastern Clackamas County's air quality. More efficient land use in downtown Gresham lessens the pressure to develop farmland in Hillsboro. Roads don't stop at city boundaries and water quality problems find their way from stream to river. By providing regional coordination and setting regional standards, cities and counties can achieve better coordination with the neighbors — and this benefits all of the region.

Local governments carry out local planning functions, such as zoning, permitting, and local street and neighborhood design. Metro's job is to assure that local planning is coordinated throughout the metropolitan area in order to protect air quality, address traffic congestion, and protect farm and forest lands outside the urban growth boundary, as required by state law.

* Source: *MetroFacts*, Metro Regional Services, September 12, 1997.

Notes

