

# HOW TO BEST CONTACT YOUR LEGISLATORS

By Ray Bell, USAWOA Executive Director and Secretary to The Military Coalition, March 2001

Because of the declining military presence in Congress, it is increasingly important that USAWOA members and family members contact Congress about matters of significance to the military. We must work together to communicate our areas of concern and interest.

USAWOA and other military associations "lobby" for various points of view. However, there is no substitute for personal correspondence from "constituents."

How to contact your representatives and senators? Undoubtedly, the best is a personal letter or e-mail. The following tips will add more "clout" to your correspondence.

- ALWAYS provide your full name & address, particularly if you use e-mail. Include your voting address if it's different than your residence address. Unsigned letters go to the round file along with those with no address.
- Write primarily to your elected officials; those serving the address you provide in your correspondence. In this electronic age, it's easy to produce similar letters to a large group of addressees. It's even easier to send e-mail to many addressees. Letters and e-mail sent to other than your specific elected officials get little, if any, attention.

This advice changes if the legislator is a committee chair or the "author" and leading champion of a particular bill. Our advice? Direct your letters to your specific elected officials.

- Keep your letters to one page. If you must go to two, use separate pages (not back to back.) Write legibly if you have not typed or electronically prepared your letter.
- Limit your letter to one subject, or at the most, two related subjects. If you want to comment on several subjects, write more than one letter.
- Research issues; be smart. Don't write, "everything's messed up, do something!" Be factual. Don't write with emotional or philosophical arguments. Instead, write, "I am interested in such-and-such a topic. What is your position on this subject? Have you introduced or sponsored legislation on this topic?"

Learn the House and/or Senate "numbers" assigned to bill(s) relating to the subject. In your letter, clearly state & refer to the numbers. Briefly, tell what you think about the bill(s). If you favor a bill, tell how it will benefit you and others. If you oppose a bill, tell how it will adversely affect you and others. Present alternatives. Seek your legislator's view, but do not demand they "take a stand" or tell your elected official what to do. Request a written reply. "Mass-Mailings" have less affect than personal letters. However, USAWOA will periodically ask your participation in mail campaigns.

Mass mailings are designed to generate the "big numbers" required by house and/or senate leadership to bring a particular subject to the floor. Our advice? If you can't send a personal letter or e-mail, participate in the mass mail campaigns dealing with the issues of importance to you.

Telephone calls have less impact than letters, unless the topic is of such overwhelming interest that congressional staffers are "keeping score."

Who are your legislators and what's their address? There are a number of resources. Local congressional offices, libraries, newspapers, and/or political party offices can provide you names and addresses.

The Internet is an excellent and current source. The House web site (with links to each representative) is at <[www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov)> while the Senate (with links) is at <[www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)>. USAWOA can also provide the information for your specific legislators. If all else fails, the phone number of the Capitol switchboard is 202-224-3121.

Specific bills and reports can be researched on the Library of Congress "Thomas" web site at <[www.thomas.gov](http://www.thomas.gov)>. Copies of bills can also be obtained by making a written request. Addresses are: House Document Room, B-18 Ford House Office Building, Washington DC 20515. (Phone 202-226-5200.) Senate Document Room, B-04 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington DC 20510. (Phone is 202-224-7860.

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