**Writing a Letter to Congress**

So, you're going to write a letter to Congress? Good idea. Make it a *good* letter. People who think members of Congress pay little or no attention to constituent mail, are plain wrong. Concise, well thought out personal letters are one of the most effective ways Americans have of influencing law-makers. But, members of Congress get hundreds of letters and emails every day. Whether you choose to use the Postal Service or email, here are some tips that will help your letter to Congress have impact.  
  
**Think Locally**  
It's usually best to send letters to the representative from your local Congressional District or the senators from your state. Your vote helps elect them -- or not -- and that fact alone carries a lot of weight. It also helps personalize your letter. Sending the same "cookie-cutter" message to every member of Congress may grab attention but rarely much consideration.  
  
**Keep it Simple**  
Your letter should address a single topic or issue. Typed one-page letters are best. (Ms. Peña will accept handwritten letters.) A three-paragraph letter structured like this is recommended:

1. Say why you are writing and who you are. List your "credentials." (If you want a response, you must include your name and address, even when using email.)
2. Provide more detail. Be factual not emotional. Provide specific rather than general information about how the topic affects you and others.
3. Close by requesting the action you want taken: a vote for or against a bill, or change in general policy.

**Key Things to Always Do**

1. Be courteous and respectful without "gushing."
2. Clearly and simply state the purpose of your letter.
3. Say who you are. Anonymous letters go nowhere. Even in email, include your correct name, address, phone number and email address. If you don't include at least your name and address, you will not get a response.
4. State any professional credentials or personal experience you may have, especially those pertaining to the subject of your letter.
5. Keep your letter short -- one page is best.
6. Use specific examples or evidence to support your position.
7. State what it is you want done or recommend a course of action.
8. Thank the member for taking the time to read your letter.

**Key Things to Never Do**

1. Use vulgarity, profanity, or threats. The first two are just plain rude and the third one can get you a visit from the Secret Service. Simply stated, don't let your passion get in the way of making your point,
2. Fail to include your name and address, even in email letters.
3. Demand a response.

**Addressing Members of Congress**

To Your Senator:

The Honorable (full name)  
United States Senate (Room #) (Name) Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

To Your Representative:

The Honorable (full name)   
United States House of Representatives

(Room #) (Name) House Office Building   
Washington, DC 20515   
  
Dear Representative:

\*\*The above addresses should be used in email messages, as well as those sent through the Postal Service.