

Effective Communication with your legislators with Jill Lane

Welcome

Effective communication tools

Q & A

How to set up your own postcard event

Write a postcard community

Sample postcard:

State the issue

State your position

Give your name, city, and zip code:

I am opposed to the import of widgets. Please consider voting against bill XYZ. Susie Smith, Seattle, 98125

Calling your legislators:

Be cordial, keep it brief,

Jill's background: adjunct political science professor at NSC, used to work in Capitol Hill in Congress. Has worked for the army in international relations. Her views expressed tonight reflect her own, not her current or former employers'.

Average senator represents millions of people. Average house member represents 700,000. There is a multiplier effect attributed to communications; they assume that 50-100 people feel the same as each person who communicates in.

If you don't speak up about your needs, they don't know and won't represent your interests. They work for us. They are our employees.

People are feeling overwhelmed; "What is real? What is an alternative fact? So much overwhelming stuff." This isn't a sprint, this is a marathon. Pacing yourself is critical for this to be a movement.

Choose 2-3 topics that are important for you, to focus on.

[Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov)

Posts all pieces of legislation submitted on Congress, described in plain English rather than legalese. It matters to be informed when you call in.

#1 rule is *tell the truth* when you're an activist.

Congressional staffers rely on accurate information from all of us. They are relaying information to the politicians and need reliable information.

If you have kids and a job and a busy life, and it's overwhelming to track down this information, it's okay. There is no wrong way to participate. You can join an interest group. Example: the NRA is extremely effective. They have a huge membership, they send out action items regarding legislation to their members every week, give them scripts, ask for donations, etc. Interest groups want you to participate.

Calls versus letter writing

There is misinformation on social media saying that calls are always better than other communication methods.

If you call: KISS it – “Keep it simple, stupid”

- Identify yourself
- Say where you are from. They will only write down your opinion if you are from their district.
- There may be SOME value in bombarding other districts (Example: Wyoming politician who got 22,000 phone calls in 3 days after making sexist comments about women sitting down and shutting up, which really got his attention)
- Be polite! Staffers are overwhelmed. Average receptionist on the Hill makes \$17k a year. They all keep their doors open and hear phones ALL the time. The level of phone calling happening right now is unprecedented.
- Calling committees: if they seek input, give it, call them.
- (Remember, pacing yourself is critical!)

Never assume that just because your representative is in your party or has the views you do, that they will vote how you want them to. Ask the reps what their views are and how they plan to vote.

Pramila Jayapal has been very open about her views.

Patty Murray tends to be a little quieter but her staff is meeting with people every day. Has been notoriously quiet, but has been very active recently on social media because she has been inundated. Call her. Make no assumptions. Hold them accountable. Remember that their #1 goal is to get re-elected, and they can't do that unless people vote for them.

How to write a letter

- One pagers rule Washington!
- Staff wants to be able to quickly see your views.
- Some people believe that hard letters are more effective because they can be touched and seen. Before this election, most offices in Washington averaged 5,000 a week. Recently, it's been 80,000 a week.
- When they see them, they carry them in and open them.
- First thing they look for: where is the person from. Start with: “Dear so-and-so, My name is so-and-so and I live in your district and voted for you.” This tells them they are accountable to you.
- Next, specify the bill or issue and state your opinion.
- Share your credentials on why they should listen to your views.
- You can also email. Go to House.gov or senate.gov and look for your state and look up their contact information.

Question: can you address the links being broken or other websites or calls being down?
This administration is taking us backward in terms of transparency. Example - EPA website, etc. Don't waste your time leaving voicemails if there is nobody answering the phone. Has seen them just being erased. You can use your time more wisely.
Demand transparency and other issues with the Executive branch. Ask Congress to hold the Executive branch accountable.

Postcards are fine. Historically, the mass ones that interest groups provided were not effective, but right now they're fine.

Question: are postcards better than envelopes? Anthrax has been a concern and a reality. Remember that staffers should not be harmed.

FAXes

They have to have fax lines available. Fax lines are completely tied up.

Members of Congress in the House and Senate are given a chunk of money at the beginning of their term and allocate their resources as they see fit. Some junior level people are being reassigned to letter opening.

You might get a reply! About 50% likelihood of getting a response. You can say that you don't want a reply if you don't want one.

Individual calls or cards don't directly cause a vote, but in aggregate, it makes a difference. If you have 22,000 phone calls and letters from people in your district, you better listen, or you won't get re-elected.

Protests

Tea party – study examined the protest and see how it influences later outcomes.

Protests energize people.

The more time you are together, the more impact you're going to have.

They're most impactful if they're not violent.

GOP politicians: "They're paid crazy anarchists and they're destroying things and hurting people."

This mirrors beginning of authoritarian regimes. It's a tactic to divide and control people.

Remind people that the Constitution gives people the right to protest and disagree with leaders.

The politicians are humans. They are not all *that* great. They're just humans. They work for us. Don't be intimidated. Focus on the helpers.

Town Hall Meetings

Chavitz in Utah – his town halls have been in the news.

Hundreds of people are coming to town hall meetings and seeking to hold people accountable.

Asking him to hold people accountable (Flynn, Affordable Care Act)

Republican rep, thinking his mic was off: "Oh my god, these women won't leave me alone. They're everywhere. What am I supposed to do?" His aide replied, "Listen to them".

In DC, people tell them they're great; they're in a bubble. Most members are millionaires. The needs of people who are struggling to feed their children, themselves, struggling to pay rent – this gives reality. Harder to deny a story that people told you to your face.

If you really want to take your participation to the next level, find out which staffer for your representative covers the issues that you are most interested in. Politicians rely on these staffers to know what their constituents want. They're human; 10,000 bills might get introduced a year.

Story: Jill got in a fight with a friend of hers. The average person in DC works there for 1.5-3 years. High turnover. Her friend got on Facebook and said she was sick of people writing letters and phone calls, when only town halls matter. Jill was angry because this discounts SO much

good and valuable participation. Privilege plays a role in access for these different ways of getting your voice heard. All of the different ways of voicing your opinion matter. Do what you can. Social movements are decentralized; leaders after the Women's March said they don't want a centralized place. Like sugar ants spread out all over, you can't stop the momentum or stomp it out.

Question: Is it helpful to show up at the representative's office here in Seattle or Olympia?
Yes, make appointments. Adept intelligent staffers will meet with you. Example: staffer of Patty Murray has sought stories about immigration and Affordable Care Act. Murray's office is very open, and Pramila Jayapal is very open and seeking input. Obviously we can't go to DC physically, so here is good. Do make an appointment first, to be considerate and avoid wasting your time. Just showing up without one can alienate them and make them less likely to listen to you.

Stick to the people who represent you. Etiquette: meet with staffers before meeting with the representative themselves.

Question: when you make an appointment to meet with a staffer or a representative, what should that look like?

They want to see you focus on ONE issue. Don't make a list of lots of different issues. Make a fact sheet that brings up issues and provides evidence and facts with sources. Usually these appointments are 15-20 minutes max. Be polite even if you want to rip someone's throat out. You don't want to alienate them and have your efforts diminished because you're angry. Remember that in politics, your enemy today is your ally tomorrow. There are lots of different movements happening now (Science, Women's, Black Lives Matter), and these have overlaps. Remember that people can work together on all these different movements.

Maria Cantwell

Some members of Congress want to represent the views of their constituents; some think that you want them to say their own views because they might know better. Cantwell has historically been quieter and less forthcoming about her intentions of how to vote. She has become more forthright recently with pressure.

Question: can you talk more about **committees** and how to communicate with them?

The way committees work, there is a majority and a minority chair. They give feedback on bills and decide whether to move them out of committee. What happens is that because, say, the committee on the environment covers the entire United States, they get feedback from other committees. You can write letters to committees. If you go online you can find their contact information.

Main # for Congress: 202-224-3121

They can connect you to any staffer or any committee. They will pick up and they're good at that. Put this number in your phone.

Keep it simple. Keep it sweet. Focus on one issue at a time. Try to keep emotion out of it (it's not effective to cry and talk about how you want to die or kill people – it's awkward). Be clear.

Question: What about all of those **Facebook petitions** that they want you to sign electronically?
Remember one phone or letter counts for 50-100 voters. Online petition signatures only count for 1 voter, so they carry less impact. Members don't really pay as much attention to the

petitions. It's not verifiable. They're often used to collect your information so they can email you and ask for donations.

Pramila has been asking people to sign petitions, but it's been on her campaign website. It's possible that she's building a base of people to ask for money later on. Who knows? This may be an entry point for engaging. If you can do a petition and nothing else, great. If you can make a phone call instead, that will carry more weight.

Running for Office

12,000 women have already signed up to run in 2018 and started training.

If you have time, you can sign up to be involved with campaigns. Volunteers can make an enormous difference on whether they're successful, especially if they are not millionaires.

Question: volunteering for campaigns in other states or vulnerable districts?

Legally, the national Republican and Democratic party committees (RNC, DNC) can't actively work on people running against each other until the primary is held. You can reach out to them or donate to them. You can't earmark your money for Washington under FEC law. So, what you could do is donate directly to politicians who are running against particular other candidates.

Contact information:

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Postcards

Stamps.com - \$15 a month after trial period for prepaid postcards – otherwise just use normal postcards with a stamp

Please organize your friends! Just get together with 4 or 5 friends and get them mobilized.

510-200-2223 Text them your zip code and it will send you a text with the contact information for your representatives.

You can send them appreciation as well! They are people :)

Question: **Tweeting and contacting reps over social media** - effective?

The level of sophistication varies between reps. Some have very active social media accounts. Effectiveness is an unknown.

Question: finding out about people who are running in 2018?

It's largely not public yet. Someone just announced for the 45th legislative district.

Campaign activity cannot be done ever on a .gov website; paid for by tax dollars. Only doc com websites. Platforms should be put up pretty soon. Easiest clearinghouse place would be the party website for the state or the county. If you have a party person who is the head for your neighborhood or zip code, you could volunteer to be Precinct Captain.

YOU could run! You could start at a local level.

Look local

Having worked for US Congress and on a local level - if you are working and working, there will be long periods where you are frustrated. On a state and local level, your needs are more

aligned with people around you, and it's more possible to influence. Personally, if you're going to donate, local is the way to go. Especially if federal money is cut, (homelessness, Planned Parenthood, etc), and people don't get their needs met anymore.

Historical example: "Act Up" in San Francisco. Reagan administration did everything to ignore a plague (AIDS). Everyone said it was impossible but they got their people elected and didn't stop advocating.

Local can have broader impact! Example: Seattle City Council divesting from Wells Fargo contributes to a cascade of other cities across the country.

A friend's modus operandi: one federal issue a day, one local issue a day, one act of kindness a day, and then takes the weekend off of politics.

Question: local senior citizen organizations like AARP. They might have more time. The AARP has the most active phone bank in the US, and has for 30 years. Phone calls are almost all retired people.

Idea: living room meet-ups where we each choose an issue and all write postcards on it. Start off with issues that people have.

Resources: Congressional Research Service, a branch of Library of Congress. They write briefs on legislation that are usually pretty clear and concise. They just wrote one yesterday on the different ACA changes. CRS reports are at <https://www.loc.gov/crsinfo/>
Federation of American Scientists has one that is open for the public. <https://fas.org>
These are the exact papers that members of congress are using to make decisions!
Written by Library of Congress intellectuals. Very non-partisan. They're incredible smart humans.