



ADVOCACY TOOLS

## Letters to the Editor

The Letters to the Editor section of your local newspaper presents an ideal forum for getting your message to its readers, be they local citizens or members of your congressional delegation. More people read the letters to the editor section than almost any other part of the paper (except the comics, of course!). It's one of the first pages many elected officials turn to.

Here are a few guidelines for getting your letter to the editor printed:

- Keep the length to about 250 words.
- Writing on behalf of your Chapter will give your letter more weight. Writing as an individual concerned citizen will create the impression of citizen support or opposition to an issue. Think about what your objective is when writing a letter to the editor.
- Avoid rambling sentences and big words.
- Most papers accept letters submitted as emails now. Check your paper's online site for where to send it or give them a call. If you type the letter—double spaced, one page maximum.
- Limit the number of points you make, and stay on the same subject.
- Be as factual as possible without being dull.

- Localize your letter—explain how the issue will affect your area.
- Accentuate the positive. When you criticize, also propose a solution to the problem, or a better alternative, if possible.

Your letter stands the best chance of getting printed when it responds to something recently printed in that newspaper, such as a news story, column, editorial, advertisement, or another letter. You can use the reference to that item as a springboard for stating your case.

Your letter can support and expand on something already in the news, make a point that was omitted, or disagree with and correct misinformation in whatever form it appeared.

And don't be afraid to ask for action—tell readers what you want them to do. This includes your elected representatives. You can be sure they read the letters to the editor. By putting their names in the letter and asking for action—a vote, cosponsorship of a bill, an explanation—you get their attention *fast*.

Modify the sample letter to the editor on the back of this toolsheet with local examples and your own style. You'll see your issue and your opinion in print in no time!

## Sample Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

President-elect Barack Obama is capitalizing on the momentum generated by his campaign and is moving quickly to set up his cabinet and advisors. [customize here by adding the name of local Obama supporters who won office and/or support clean energy or reference a story about the Obama transition.] He's made it clear that clean energy solutions will be one of his top priorities. This is smart as it will repower our economy in [state] by creating clean energy jobs and reduce our dependence on oil. Just as important, it puts us on the right path to reduce greenhouse gas pollution, the main cause of global warming and a major threat to our way of life.

The majority of Americans understand the threats posed by a warming planet – severe weather, droughts, intense hurricanes, flooding, bigger wildfires. But right now, consumers must use outdated fossil fuels to light homes and run their cars; we need better choices.

Those better choices include renewable, clean energy from solar, wind, and biofuels. And more energy efficient cars, homes and industry. The benefits of making this transition are obvious. Moving to renewable energy will not only help reduce global warming but will bring us cleaner skies, healthier children, greater energy security, and millions of green jobs producing the next generation of energy technologies. President-Elect Obama is exactly the leader we need to make this transition work for America.

YOUR NAME  
ADDRESS

**If your letter is printed, please send us a copy or email us the link to the online version in your paper.**