



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.
- 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:

Conventional Washington wisdom says that few policies can move forward in an election year. Unfortunately, some of our most pressing problems don't give us the luxury of time. Global warming is one such problem. Scientists confirm that it is happening, and the sooner we act, the more likely we are to avoid its worst impacts. As a plus, clean energy technologies can help boost our flagging economy and we can make a lot of progress through energy efficiency alone — a very cost effective way to reduce pollution. Congress must step up to this challenge and pass strong global warming legislation that cuts greenhouse gas emissions at least 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050.

If human activities continue to produce harmful heat-trapping gases in “business as usual” amounts, the Earth will experience higher sea levels, extreme weather conditions, massive species extinction, and large-scale disease increases. We are already seeing the impacts.

The United States has the resolve and the technology needed to reduce global warming pollution. By leading the way with renewable energy technologies, our country can create hundreds of thousands of new jobs — including thousands in [your state] — and emerge as a global leader in a cleaner, more secure future.

Individual states are already taking steps to adopt mandatory caps on global warming pollution and initiating renewable electricity standards. What we now need is the political will — at the federal level — to set reductions in motion. Now is the time for Congressional action and leadership.

YOUR NAME  
ORGANIZATION

1. Topic sentence should reference recent article or issue in the news.

2. Either present new data or correct data previously cited.

**If your letter is printed, please send us a copy or email us the link to the on-line version in your paper. [audubonaction@audubon.org](mailto:audubonaction@audubon.org)**

3. Offer solutions and localize when you can.

4. Drive home your point.

5. Include your name, address and phone; newspapers won't print your address but they will verify you wrote the letter.