



The Lake CONNECTION

Communicating your concerns to your legislator

By Anne Sayers, Program Director, Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters

Ask any elected official who the most effective lobbyists are and chances are they will reply: constituents. That's why it is so important that you consistently make your conservation viewpoint known to those elected to represent you. The small encouragement of just one constituent can be the final push legislators need to change their vote and, in turn, improve the state of our natural resources.

Why should you communicate with your legislators?

Your communication will educate legislators. With more than 1200 bills in the Assembly alone, there is a good chance that your communication will bring the details of the bill to their attention for the first time.

Your communication will encourage your legislators to share their position on the issue with you. Even if their position is a non-position (and many times it is!), you will have a better sense of where their concerns with the issue lie.

Keep in mind

Communication is essentially relationship building. To build a good relationship with your legislators, approach them both



when you are looking for their support and when it comes time to thank them for their good vote.

Tell them about yourself. In any communication be sure to provide your full contact information, including your voting address. Also, include identifiers that will clue the legislators into your role in the community...anything from being on the PTA to owning a small business to leading a local trout fishing group.

Be supportive of your legislators. Recognize the

sacrifices they make to do what they do. Even when you disagree with your legislators on one issue, try to find another matter on which you can agree with him or her, and affirm their work.

Dispelling common myths

Without following the happenings at the Capitol on a day-to-day basis, it can be easy to get discouraged by a few common myths. A few that consistently come up include:

My legislators always vote the right way, so

this communication won't matter. Just because your legislators typically vote well doesn't mean that they don't need to hear from you. Many times, legislators have to go out on a political limb to make the "right" vote. Your documentation of support gives them the justification they need to prove to their colleagues that they are doing right by their constituents.

My legislators never vote the right way, so this communication won't matter. You may feel like your viewpoint is often ignored, but that couldn't be further from the truth. Even when a legislator doesn't switch their vote to match your opinion, they have taken note of the fact that there is a concern in their district. The effect of that may be hard to gauge, but it is certainly there. Possibly they will support an amendment to the bill that will address your specific concern, maybe they will avoid pushing the bill to a vote, or maybe they'll actually change their mind. There's a first time for everything!

Signing on to a form postcard or a form email won't matter to my legislators. Legislators certainly recognize that you lead a busy life. Most legislators understand that a "form" letter doesn't make the opinion of the sender any less valuable. It only



The Wisconsin State Legislature makes important state budget and legislative decisions that can affect the management of our natural resources. Whether you meet with, call, write, or e-mail, establishing a relationship with your representatives is an essential part to ensure policy decisions reflect constituent values.

indicates that despite your busy life, you still found a moment to be informed on issues that impact your environment...and you took action. Your efforts will not go unnoticed.

Conclusion

Ultimately, it is your state legislators that will cast the votes that will determine how Wisconsin conserves its natural resources. Using your voice to speak with your legislators is one of the most powerful ways you can improve the air you breathe, the water you drink, and the places where you live, work and play. Do your part by contacting your legislators.

What are the best ways to communicate with a legislator?

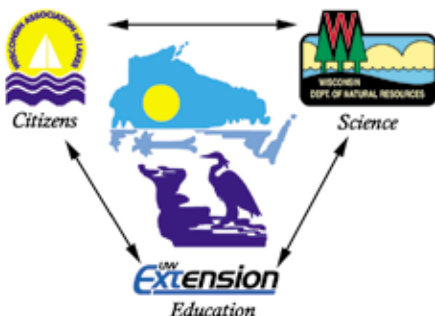
The following are popular forms of communication listed in general order of effectiveness...

1. Meeting one-on-one
2. Personalized letter
3. Phone call
4. Personalized email
5. Participating in a call-in campaign
6. Form letter generated by an organization
7. Form email
8. Form fax
9. Form postcard
10. Signing a petition

Other, less typical forms of communication, such as testifying at a public hearing, attending a town hall meeting, and submitting letters-to-the editor and editorials to the local media can also be highly effective.

Of course, timing and resources will dictate what kind of communication is possible for you, but the moral of the story is this: Any communication from a constituent is influential. Just do it!

Wisconsin Lakes Partnership



This article was originally published in the Summer 2006 edition of The Lake Connection, a quarterly publication of the Wisconsin Association of Lakes. The article was written by Anne Sayers (Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters). This article may be reprinted for educational purposes with citation.

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