How to Make a Difference

Effective Grassroots Persuasion From Your Kitchen Table

For many Hoosiers the thought of contacting their mayor, state legislator, or congressional office can be intimidating. Writing a letter to the editor to the local newspaper can be overwhelming; but it doesn't have to be that way.

More importantly, for pro-family supporters, getting your point across to the public and your elected officials is absolutely critical to positively impacting the culture around us.

It should be obvious to anyone concerned about values or our nation's founding principles that the media is not neutral. We must act wisely and be diligent in making sure our view is heard in the public square.

Communicating with Leaders

Here are a few tips to make contacting your elected officials more effective:

Social Media Isn't Enough !

✍ *Facebook* and *Twitter* are helpful communication tools, but they have significant limitations. They are not a replacement for direct contact with elected leaders. Think of it like screaming at a friend in a stadium full of people during a concert.

Even in our high tech age, the most effective way to contact your legislator is old school. Face-to-face conversations are best. This however, is usually not practical or possible. **The best way to contact an elected official is still a telephone call** or a letter. An email is very helpful, but it still ranks below a phone call message or even an old fashioned letter sent in the US Mail.

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Act Quickly

✍ Legislative action often moves quickly. The best time to write your elected official is when you first hear about the issue.

Be Specific & Limit Topics

✍ State your concern clearly and try to limit your call, letter, or e-mail to just one topic. If applicable, mention the bill number and/or title.

Use Good Information

✍ Double-check your facts. Use accurate, current information, *not rumors or hear-say*. Quoting experts can add significant credibility to your argument, but misquoting may discredit your entire argument.

We should realize that while facts and data are important, in a postmodern culture, where truth is relative, real stories and actual experiences can also be very persuasive. Liberals have often excelled in advancing their causes on the emotional pull of compassion or by playing the victim rather than using facts and data.

Be Polite

✍ You can be firm and still courteous. Sarcasm will only harm your cause.

Be Brief

✍ Legislators and most elected officials are busy. Your respect for their time by being brief will aide your argument. Lengthy letters may only be skimmed, and your points may be overlooked.

Limit "Christian'ese"

✍ Don't preach or use excessive religious terms. Your first purpose is to persuade someone who may agree with you on the issue for reasons completely unrelated to your faith. The Bible tells us to be "*as wise as a serpent and subtle as a dove*." There are better

ways and other opportunities to share your faith than through a letter about an issue or pending vote.

Don't Be Intimidated

✍️ Your elected official is there to represent you and in many cases, you may know more about a specific issue than your elected official who deals with dozens or even hundreds of different issues in a session or council.

Follow-up With a Thank You

✍️ Elected officials rarely hear "thank you." It is important to let your elected official know you appreciated his/her favorable vote or response.

You're Not Their Pen Pal

✍️ If you flood your elected official with e-mail, or telephone calls on every subject, they will usually ignore you.

Public Persuasion

Many people may not feel comfortable calling into a radio talk show or speaking before a group on the issues of the day. While these are helpful parts of public persuasion, another effective way to lobby your elected official is through letters to the editor in the newspaper. Obviously this avenue can get your point across to the general public, but it can also impact elected officials by mobilizing their constituency to contact them about the issue you have addressed. Many legislators still watch editorial pages in their district to monitor the pulse of the public. Your editorial may get their attention.

Letters to the Editor

While the tips on contacting your elected officials also apply, here are a few tips specifically on writing effective letters to the editor:

Be Brief

✍️ Most newspapers have word limitations for Letters to the Editor. Short letters are more flexible for a newspaper's layout and thus fare a better chance of being printed.

A Friendly Review

✍️ It is always a good idea to have a friend proof-read your letter for content and grammar before sending it.

Finish Strong

✍️ End your letter with a solution, action point or strong punchline.