



serving overseas Americans and the international community since 1931

Write to Washington – ok, but how?

Things are hopping in Washington, and overseas Americans have a great deal “on our plate”. One FAWCO objective is to expand the membership of the new Americans Abroad Caucus, but there are important issues of crucial importance regarding voting rights, taxation of overseas Americans, and access for Americans abroad to financial services in the United States and abroad...

We will regularly be encouraged to write to our Washington representatives, urging them to support legislation that directly affects us living abroad. When we do, it would be wise to keep a few things in mind:

Communicating with your Elected Officials

Tips On Telephoning Your Elected Representatives

Email is great but it's very effective to pick up the phone!

If you do so to call a Congressional office, immediately give your name, say that you are calling from abroad but that you are a voter in X district, and ask for the staffer responsible for ... (taxation, foreign relations, voting, etc.).

Remember that it is staffers who research and write legislation: *never underestimate the staffers!* Ask to speak with the aide who handles the issue about which you wish to comment. Even Congresspersons not on a tax committee, for example, will have someone who is familiar with tax issues...

Don't feel bad if you get a voicemail box - leave a brief message, such as: "Please tell Senator/Representative (Name) that I support/oppose (S.___/H.R.___)." You will also want to state reasons for your support or opposition to the bill. Ask for your Senator's or Representative's position on the bill. Clearly give your email address for a response (not phone number – they will not call overseas).

Tips On Writing (or emailing) Congress

The letter is the most popular choice of communication with a congressional office. Never send large brown envelopes, bulk mailing, unessential documents - they can be irradiated and seriously delayed. We are also advised to hand-address envelopes to personalize them! Faxes and emails remain the best way to communicate with your officials. If you email your Representative or Senator, send a hard copy afterward. Avoid email attachments – such messages may be blocked.

One of the most helpful things you can do is go to the House & Senate websites and check the composition of certain committees to see if you have a Representative or Senator on:

Senate Appropriations / Finance / Foreign Relations / Judiciary / Rules and Administration / Special Committee on Aging (for example) and House Appropriations / House Administration / International Relations / Judiciary / Ways and Means...

and contact the committee staff. In important cases, take the time to contact every member of the committee.

If you decide to write a letter, remember:

1. ALWAYS state at the beginning of your letter/email that you are a (your state) voter now living outside the United States, and ALWAYS give your voting address at the end of your letter; if you cannot give an address, at least begin your letter stating that you vote in X district in Y state;
2. If your letter pertains to a specific piece of legislation, identify it accordingly, e.g., House bill: H. R. ____, Senate bill: S.____ State the purpose of your letter in the first paragraph; address only one issue in each letter and if possible, keep your letter to one page.
3. Don't write only to *ask for* something; remember also to write to say *thank you* for support; never be negative!
4. If you borrow from a “standard” letter, personalize it in some way, showing how the issue directly affects you.

Note: When writing to the Chair of a Committee or the Speaker of the House, it is proper to address them as: Dear Mr. Chairman or Madam Chairwoman or Dear Mr. Speaker.

