**How To Influence Your Elected Officials
A Shortcut to Getting Your Voice Heard**

Most of us have an opinion on some public policy issues of the day. As good citizens, we follow what our government is doing in our name and care about how and what they decide.

Occasionally, an issue comes up that gets so much of our attention that we want to let our government know how we feel about it, regardless of whether we agree or disagree with what they have done.

We can try to let our friends and neighbors know how we feel about things and get their agreement. We can make sure to vote in the next election. We might even dash off a letter to the editor about what has us motivated to speak out. But while those actions are commendable and make us feel good, there is no guarantee that those actions will be effective in reaching the policy makers that we want to influence.

One of the best ways to let our officials know how we feel is to tell them. We can write a letter, call or dash off an email to our elected officials, but that is so inconvenient that few of bother. Frankly, it is a pain to look up each relevant officials’ contact information then phone, email or text them individually every time we want to express our opinion to them.

Fortunately, there is an easier way. There is a website that gives you their contact information in one convenient place and allows you to enter the one(s) you plan on contacting in your contact list. Once you’ve done that, you can email, call, email or text them as easily as you do your friends and relatives.

Here is the way to do it.

1. Go to <https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials>.
2. Fill out the short form.
3. Click on the Find My Elected Officials link.
4. Click the plus on federal state and local to open a list.
5. Click the plus beside each relevant name you wish to contact and their contact info opens.
6. For future reference, create a contact for the ones you are interested in your phone contacts

Using this easy to navigate website, expressing your opinion on a policy or decision or even just asking a question is a lot easier than it used to be. Once you have their contact information, email, call or text them with your opinion, suggestion or comment.

However, because government officials get a lot of inquiries and are often suspicious of these if they are generated by interest groups and use a form letter, here are some hints to enhance your chances of being taken seriously.

* Don’t use a form letter. Write or speak in your style, not some interest group’s style.
* Identify yourself with your name and address and tell them how to contact you.
* Be polite.
* Be brief and to the point.
* Make all of your remarks relevant.
* Don’t be a pest. Contact them when you have something relevant to say on an issue that is important to you. Once per issue is usually enough.
* You don’t have to remind them that you vote. They assume that.

Your government represents. You have a right to let them hear your citizen’s voice. Our democracy will be better for it.