

YOUR INPUT INTO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT—SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS

By Sarah Horrigan

WRITING A LETTER to your Senator or Representative is almost guaranteed to evoke a response, particularly in an election year. Making your letter clear (so a response is easy) can allow you to have considerable input. Following are a few suggestions.

Address only one issue in a letter. Each letter is assigned to a particular staff person covering a given issue area. If there is more than one issue per letter, it may be assigned to the wrong staff person, and the reply will be difficult to write, so it will get put at the bottom of the pile.

A reply that's easy to write will get put at the top of the pile. It's important to remember that congressional staff are trained to make constituents feel good. Therefore, if you ask for something that's relatively easy to do and about which the Member is ambivalent (co-sponsor the Sea Grant reauthorization bill, for example), the staff person will comply with your request and write back a pleasant letter. ("Thank you for contacting me about. . . . You will be pleased to know that I support. . . .") That's a lot easier than rationalizing why the Member is opposed to your view while still trying to keep you as a friend (and supporter).

How do you know what to ask your Member to do? Associations and societies with Washington offices usually have the ability to track legislation and to alert their members about important issues. Some society publications have one-page legislative updates (for example, *Physics Today*, *ASM News*, *EOS*). Associations (groups of institutions rather than individuals) include the Council on Ocean Affairs (COA) and the Board on Oceans and

Atmosphere of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC). NASULGC maintains a bulletin board on OMNET with approximately weekly reports of activities in Congress (contact S. Horrigan on OMNET to be prompted for the bulletin board, if you are located at a NASULGC institution). Staff at COA and NSULGC also can respond to limited individual requests for information about congressional activities.

What does Congress have to offer TOS members? One area of considerable interest is federal funding for university-based research. This is a touchy subject at the moment, given the negative publicity that universities have received recently and the constraints on the budget. If you write to support federal funding for research, it is important to recognize the view of Representative Brown (D-CA), who is chairman of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology: Scientists must view research funding as an opportunity that comes with a responsibility rather than as a right.

What do scientists have to offer Congress? Ideally, the scientific community should provide sound, unbiased information to guide policy decisions that congress must make. If there is no input, the policy decisions will be made anyway, without the benefit of scientific input. On the other hand, if the input is tied to requests for funding, then scientists become "just another lobbying group." If you are writing your congressperson with advice on a policy issue, it's probably better to keep the funding issue out of the letter.

Editor's Note: Sarah Horrigan, a TOS member, spent last year as a Congressional Fellow in the office of Congressman Edward J. Markey (D-MA), sponsored by the American Society for Microbiology. She is currently the Assistant Director—Federal Relations (Marine and Environmental Affairs) at the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges.

MEETINGS AND WORKSHOPS

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1993 Third Meeting of The Oceanography Society, Seattle

Seattle will be the site for our third meeting during 13–16 April 1993. Information regarding the meeting is presented on the inside of the back cover.

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Workshop on Laboratory Modeling of Dynamic Processes in the Ocean, St. Petersburg, Russia

During 8–12 September 1992, a session will be held on meso- and microstructure of the ocean, including discussions of measurements and models of processes. Please contact Prof. Ju. D. Chashechkin, Institute for Problems in Mechanics, Prospect Vernadskogo 101, Moscow, 117526, CIS.

Marine Technology Society in Washington, DC

MTS will hold its meeting during 19–22 October 1992 at the Washington Sheraton. Contact Sparge & Associates at 703/631-6200.

International Conference on Southern Hemisphere Meteorology and Oceanography, Hobart, Tasmania

This meeting will be held during 29 March to 2 April 1993 in Hobart. For more information contact Richard D. Rosen at 617/547-6207.

International Conference on School and Popular Meteorological & Oceanographic Education, Toronto

This conference will take place during 14–18 July 1993, and further information can be obtained from Evelyn Mazuer at 617/227-2425.