Finding Your Voice: Calling, Testifying, and Speaking to Elected Officials

• Your voice matters!

• We live in a representative democracy. Our elected officials are representing US.

• We need to take advantage of the opportunities afforded constituents to influence our representatives.
Finding your voice matters!

- Verbal, personal testimony has an emotional impact.
- News reporters frequently cover hearings and town halls.
- Sends an important message to agencies, legislators, and the public about your commitment and attention to the issue.
- Agencies and law makers are under pressure to do the wrong thing, and appreciate support to do the right thing.
This is hard! Why do it? Well... It works!

If your Member/Senator has not already arrived at a firm decision on an issue, how much influence might the following advocacy strategies directed to the Washington office have on his/her decision?

- In-Person Issue Visits from Constituents: 94%
- Contact from Constituents’ Reps: 94%
- Individualized Email Messages: 92%
- Individualized Postal Letters: 88%
- Local Editorial Referencing Issue Pending: 87%
- Comments During Telephone Town Hall: 87%
- Phone Calls: 84%
- Letter to the Editor Referencing Your Boss: 84%
- Visit From a Lobbyist: 83%
- Form Email Messages: 56%

(n = 190-192)
Source: Congressional Management Foundation 2015 survey of congressional staff, including Chiefs of Staff, Communications Directors, Legislative Directors, and Legislative Assistants.
Let’s cover three ways to make your voice heard:

- Calling your elected official
- Attending town hall meetings & public forums
- Testifying at a hearing
Preparation

• Know who you are meeting with – it might be a staffer.
• Connect your message to the issue.
• Know a few details about the bill or issue, including the bill number and what the bill says if possible.
• Know the legislator’s history on the issue
• Prepare something to leave behind – a handout with relevant resources, photos, facts, and contact info.
• Understand what role the legislator can/does play on the issue.
Key components of effective testimony, town hall comment

- Identify yourself*
- Thank the elected for a past action/stance
- Present your position and ask
- Tell a personal story/Speak from your experience
- Request action and offer a solution
- Know & respect time limitations
- Thank them for their time

*more on next slide
Identify yourself

• Introduce yourself with your name and where you live/are from.
• If relevant, say what your profession, expertise, or interest is.
• If you are there on behalf of a special interest group, state the name of the organization or group, briefly describe the group’s mission, and state how many members it has.
• If you know you have something in common with the legislator, use it in your introduction.
Give thanks

Even if you don’t agree with the legislator on much, thank them for something they have done or said that you do agree with. Acknowledge their efforts on the issue.

• For example: Thank you for your past support of protecting Wilderness in Oregon.
Stick to the facts, but be real

• It’s ok to elicit emotion in your comments through telling a story or personal experience, but relate it to real facts as well.
• Back up your information with citations to reliable sources. (Consider having a copy or link to your sources to provide to decision makers.)
• By making your comments clear, specific and on-point, you help to assure that decision makers will be required to give your concerns serious consideration.
Calling Your Elected Official

- A staff person will likely answer the phone. Their job is to make a note of your call and position.
- You can call after hours or on weekends if you’d like to leave a message for your Rep.
- Expect the call to take less than 3 minutes.

Tips on how to make effective calls:
- Phone calls don’t have to be eloquent and should be clear and concise
- Remember to be polite and to thank the staffer for taking your call
- Sample script:
  Hi, my name is ____ and my zip code is ___. I’m calling today about ____ and I’d like to urge ____ to support/oppose/protect _____. Thank you for your time, bye.
Town Hall Meetings & Public Forums

Legislators hold town hall meetings to see what is on their constituents’ minds.

They hold public forums on specific issues when there is an important vote or bill debate coming up.

• Consider attending with friends or other advocates who can all make similar points.
• At town halls, you may either need to sign up to ask a question, or be given a ticket that may be drawn at random.
• If you are called, you only get one chance to make your point or ask your question.
• Think about what you want to say or ask in advance. Prepare two or three key points. Write them down.
• Be respectful of others’ time.
Hearings and Commission Meetings

• What are they for?
  – Rule making (e.g. Wolf Plan, Riparian Protections)
  – Administrative decisions (e.g. Elliott State Forest)
  – Legislation (e.g. Banning Aerial Spray, Protecting Pollinators)

• When should you go?
  – For legislative hearings – only if invited by bill advocates or legislator
  – For rules and decisions – Can be good to show up in force to show support for certain outcome.
Hearings: Preparation

• Hearing testimony is usually limited to 2-3 minutes, and it goes by faster than you might think!
• Think about what you want to say or ask in advance. Prepare two or three key points.
• Practice or role-play your testimony in front of a mirror or your family (FOR REAL!) so you are comfortable with your testimony and you stick within the time limits.
• Prepare a written version of your testimony to submit.

• Arrive early to sign up to speak.
Hearings: Doing it

- Listen to other testimony and try not to repeat what a previous speaker has presented. (A good chance to make your personal experience stand out!)
- Address the committee/board properly (see below)
- Bring written testimony.
  - This ensures all your points are on the record if you get cut off.
  - Include supporting materials or data.
  - Bring enough copies for all members of the committee.

At a hearing, address the Chair, and then the members of the Committee or Commission. “Chair Finley and Members of the Commission, my name is...”
Let’s Practice!

• Write up a few talking points for your phone call script and for a townhall question.
• Pair up to practice a phone call.
• Practice asking a question at a meeting, pretending I’m a Senator or other elected official.
Wilderness, Public Lands, Environmental Laws

Our Congressional representatives need your pressure to stand up against proposals in Congress to sell off or transfer public lands to state or private interests, and to weaken environmental laws like the Endangered Species Act. And they need your support for designating Wilderness and other protections.

Key message: Public lands provide recreation, clean air and water, scenic beauty, and quality of life. We need to keep public lands in public hands!

Key message: Millions of acres of special places in Oregon still need Wilderness protection. Congress must protect our natural treasures for future generations. Now is the time to finally pass protections for the Wild Rogue and Devil’s Staircase Wilderness proposals!

Key message: Environmental laws like NEPA and the ESA are vital to protecting our public lands, wildlife, and clean water. Please stand up against proposals to weaken these laws that cut the public out of public land.
Upcoming Opportunities...

• Call Senator Wyden and Merkley this week about the Farm Bill
• Call Gov. Brown about the Pacific Connector LNG pipeline and Jordan Cove facility
• Senator Wyden town hall meeting, July 2, Roosevelt Middle School, 12pm-2pm
Whooo ya gonna call?

Just a reminder: It’s easy to find your elected officials! These sites have maps and contact info.

- [https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/FindYourLegislator/leg-districts.html](https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/FindYourLegislator/leg-districts.html)
- [https://www.senate.gov/senators/contact/](https://www.senate.gov/senators/contact/)
Your Wild Ones Leaders

Chandra LeGue – Western OR Field Coordinator (Eugene)

Alex Harris – Public Lands Fellow (Portland)

Danielle Moser – Wildlife Coordinator (Portland)

Sarah Cuddy – Ochoco Mountains Campaign Organizer (Bend)

Gaby Diaz – Office Manager (Portland)

Jason Gonzales – Forest & Watershed Campaign Organizer (Eugene)