



TOOLS FOR THE CITIZEN ACTIVIST

Calling Your State Legislators

Your state Senators and Representatives want to hear from you. Most of them really do work hard. Because of Committee meetings, commuting home, and all the other work that goes with being a legislator, plus having a regular job, they often have little opportunity to meet personally with constituents. But without an understanding of their district, no legislator can expect to be an effective representative, or expect to be re-elected. When you talk to a legislator, your voice will be listened to. Often, a few calls from concerned citizens can make the difference in a legislator's decision about a vote. Because of the strict deadlines that the Oklahoma Legislature follows, letters are often too slow to keep up with events. Email is fast but phone calls will always get more attention. Telephone calls are almost always the best way to give your opinion before a critical vote.

Where To Call

Legislators can be reached at the Capitol during the week. The number at the House of Representatives is 405/521-2711 or 800/522-8502 and the Senate is 405/524-0126. Ask for your legislator by name and you will be connected with their office. The Oklahoma Legislature rarely meets on Friday and nearly all legislators go home for the weekend. Don't be hesitant about calling them at home. They are all public officials and **expect** to be called at home. Their home numbers are published and they are also listed in the phone book. You may get an answering machine but politicians are very good at returning calls from the folks back home.

Who To Talk To

State legislators have limited staff. Some even share a legislative assistant. If you call during the session, you will probably need to leave a message with their office. Even though they may not have a chance to return your call till later, they check their messages frequently. Your chances of speaking to your legislator directly are best if you call early in the morning, before committee meetings begin (generally 9:00 AM). When you call them at home, you should speak directly to the legislator.

Your Message

Don't be intimidated. Legislators have to deal with so many varied issues that they can really stay up to date on the details of only a few topics they are personally interested in or deal with through committee assignments. In nearly all cases, you know more about your issue than they do. When leaving a message with the office, keep it brief and to the point. Know the bill number you are calling about and the specific action you want them to take (support an amendment, oppose a bill in committee, *etc.*). When talking to the legislator, give personal reasons about how the issue affects **you**, as well as factual arguments. In general, the very fact that you care enough to call and express an opinion will carry great weight.