



# State Election Information

## From Candidate to Elected Official –Advancing Environmental Issues One Step at a Time

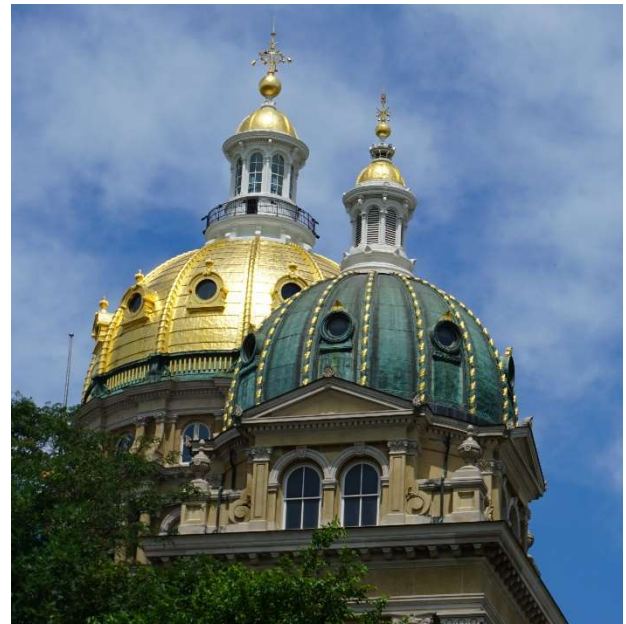
Have you ever wondered why the political candidates, legislators and the governor don't talk about environmental issues? It could be that no one is talking to the candidates about those issues. If they do not hear from their constituents and potential voters, they do not know that the voter is concerned about protecting the environment.

“Representative government is a two-way street. Elected representatives need your help to identify problems and solutions. You must communicate your position. Otherwise, they may rely on public opinion polls or the lobbyists of well-financed special interest groups. Take the initiative.”<sup>1</sup>

As a voter, you can educate the candidates following some simple steps that are outlined in this document. The process does not stop at the ballot box; you must continue the communication with your elected officials throughout the year. Tips for staying in touch with your legislator and the governor are also outlined in this document.

Charlie Winterwood, Political Chair for the Iowa Chapter, says “I am on a first name basis with my area legislators, supervisors and council people. I attend their public functions and ask them an environmental question, make a point of speaking with them at non-political events and get the vote out for them (at least the ones I like). As a result I always get a response to my e-mails.”

Perhaps most importantly, talk to your friends, neighbors, and relatives about the candidates and the issues. Our opposition isn't afraid to talk about issues and we shouldn't be afraid.



*Photo of Iowa Capitol, by Pam Mackey Taylor*

We need your assistance in order to advance environmental solutions in Iowa.

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<sup>1</sup> Caryl Terrell, “Keys to Effective Lobbying,” Sierra Club

## Acquainting Candidates with Environmental Issues

As a voter, you are in a position to educate the candidate. Here is a simple formula:

- Make the candidate aware of the issue and solutions.
  - Write an email or letter to the candidate describing the issue and what you would like them to support. Include your name, address and phone number in case the candidate wants to follow-up. If the candidate wants more information and you need assistance with an explanation, contact 515-277-8868 or [iowa.chapter@sierraclub.org](mailto:iowa.chapter@sierraclub.org).
  - When a candidate is shaking hands, have a one-minute summary of your issue and tell the candidate that you would like to see him or her support the issue.
- Ask the candidate how he or she feels about the issue when they appear at public meetings and campaign events.
- Write letters to the editor of your local paper about your issue. Each newspaper has its own requirements for letters to editor so check with the paper.
- Build some enthusiasm and awareness about environmental issues by talking about the issues to your neighbors, friends and relatives. Don't be bashful about talking about political issues! Our opponents don't hesitate.
- Ask your neighbors who are like-minded about the issue to talk to the candidates and write letters to the editor. Having other supporters helps ensure that your interests are known by the candidate and are supported by more than one person.
- If you use social media, such as Facebook or Twitter, be sure to post comments on the issues and candidates.
- Express your views on talk radio. Although it can be intimidating at first, talk radio is one of the key means for the public to learn about issues.
- Volunteer for candidates who support your issue, to help them get elected to office. Once they are serving as elected officials, they can begin implementing environmental policies.
- Finally, and most importantly, make your choice at the ballot box.



*Dome of the Iowa Capitol, by Pam Mackey Taylor*

## Advancing environmental issues at the Iowa Capitol

Most constituents never contact their legislator in any form – whether it be via a letter, e-mail, phone call or visit. If your legislator does not receive communication from you, he or she does not know what you're thinking. The result is that your thoughts will not go into his or her decision process when legislation is introduced, amendments are offered or votes are cast. If the other side is talking with the legislator, that side will have input.

### Some tips on communicating with a legislator

It is good to communicate with your own representative or senator; however, you are free to communicate with any legislator. It is also a good idea to communicate with the committee members who are working on the issue that interests you.

Because bill numbers frequently change as they move through the process, a good hint is to talk about the issue and your position on the issue. Mention the bill number if it is currently before the committee on which the legislator is a member or the bill is on the debate calendar.

It is a good idea to stick to one topic, bill or issue when you contact the legislator. Use your own words, state why the issue is important, be clear about what action you want the legislator to take.

Also write a thank you note if your legislator voted favorably on a bill.

The Iowa Chapter maintains a list of the bills we follow and lobby in support or in opposition. Legislative information, including the list of bills of interest to the chapter, is available on our website at [www.sierraclub.org/iowa/iowa-legislature](http://www.sierraclub.org/iowa/iowa-legislature)

### Stay in touch with your elected official

**Email.** Email is a good way to communicate with your legislator. At the bottom of the e-mail, include your name, address, and phone number. To find the email address for a representative or senator, see: [www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/house](http://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/house)  
[www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/senate](http://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/senate)  
If you do not know who your representative or senator is, see [www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/find](http://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/find)

**Phoning a legislator at the capitol.** To contact your legislator at the capitol, you can call the capitol switchboard and leave a message and your name and phone number. To contact a representative, the phone number is 515-281-3221. To contact a senator, the phone number is 515-281-3371.

**Hard-copy letters.** You can write hard-copy letters to your legislator and send them to: 1007 East Grand Avenue, Des Moines, IA 50319. Be sure to address it to Dear Senator (or Representative) and that legislator's last name.

**In-District Legislator Constituent Meetings.** Legislators regularly hold meetings in their districts. Check your local papers for dates, times, and locations of these meetings. Also check the legislator's web page or social media account for constituent meetings. We encourage you to ask a question about an environmental issue at these meetings.

**Visiting the Capitol.** You are welcome to visit the capitol and discuss issues with your senator and representative.

**Sign-up for e-mail newsletters.** Many legislators send email newsletters to their constituents. You can ask to be put on their email lists.



*Photo by Pam Mackey Taylor*

**Write letters to the editor.** Another good way to attract legislative interest in environmental issues is to write letters to the editor of the newspapers serving your area, including regional or state-wide papers.

**Contact your legislator when the Legislature is not in session.** You are also allowed to contact your legislator when the legislature is not in session. You can ask your representatives to introduce bills on your behalf or to support or oppose legislation. You can provide them with materials and information about the issue. Most legislators can be found in the local phone directory and many have web sites and social media accounts.

**A brief message during a handshake.** When a legislator is shaking hands at a public event, have a one-minute summary of your issue prepared so you can relate it to the legislator while you are shaking hands, articulating that you would like to see him or her support the issue.

**Encourage others to contact their elected officials.** When several people make the same pitch to a legislator, it adds strength to your own message.

## Communicating with the Governor

Don't forget to ask the governor to support policies important to you or to approve or veto legislation. You can contact the governor's office at 515-281-5211. You can send a hard-copy letter to the governor to 1007 East Grand Avenue, Des Moines, IA 50319. To electronically send a letter to the governor, you must use the website [www.governor.iowa.gov/constituent-services/register-opinion](http://www.governor.iowa.gov/constituent-services/register-opinion).

## It's all about relationships. . .

Kraig Paulson, formerly Speaker of the House, offered this advice about effective lobbying:

“Just as in life, the legislature runs on relationships, Kraig says. A relationship doesn't constitute someone who rushes in to make contact with legislators for the first time on a big bill that he or she cares about, then disappears for five or ten years. Relationships are about getting involved with one's elected officials back home.

He cites as an example an individual who works with Rural Electric Coops in the state. Every year when Kraig takes part in the parade in one of the towns in his district, he knows that when he turns a certain corner, this individual will get up from his lawn chair, come out to him in the parade and say hello. The individual also comes down to the Capitol a couple of times a year to visit with him.



“He never asks for anything, but I know who he is. And, when a bill comes up in the house that has some impact on RECs, he'll call me and say ‘Kraig, that bill would be harmful to the RECs and their members.’ Because I have a relationship with this person, because I know who he is, I listen.

“People sometimes ask, ‘What is the best way to contact a legislator?’ If you have a relationship with that legislator, it doesn't matter how you contact us,” he says. “If you're a constituent who I know for a host of reasons and who now has an issue to lobby me on, I will listen.”

“In short, rather than the issue driving the relationship, the relationship drives the issue.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> By Steve Boeckman, “House Minority Leader – Kraig Paulsen Uses His Leadership Talents to Keep His Party's Voice Heard,” *The Iowa Lawyer*, March 2010, pages 28-30.

# Media Opportunities

Don't forget to use the media to let others know about issues and candidates. The newspaper, talk radio, and even social media can be used.

## Tips on Writing a Letter to the Editor

Legislators read the editorial pages. Don't be afraid speak up and send a letter to the editor (or LTE) of your local newspaper or one of the state's dailies. Here are some tips to assist you in writing an effective letter to the editor.

- Each newspaper sets guidelines for letters to the editor, including the maximum number of words that can be in the letter, where to submit the letter, how frequently a letter-writer can be published.
- Determine what those guidelines are by contacting the editorial page editor or checking on-line.
- Select a topic; narrow the topic to a single point.
- Start the letter with a statement of your point.
- Make the letter timely, such as a reply to a recent article, a published letter or an upcoming event.
- In the letter, express why the reader should care about the issue or should get involved in the issue. You might send a letter to correct an error or erroneous assumption. You might also relate the issue to what is happening in your community. Avoid exaggerating and NEVER lie.
- Your letter will have a better chance of being published if you write from a different point of view or different content from what has already been published.
- Do not send the same letter to another newspaper.
- Do not copy a letter someone else has submitted.
- When you submit the letter, include your name, phone number, address and e-mail address so that the editor can follow-up with you. Some editors will verify that you actually did write the letter.
- Determine how the letter to the editor can be submitted. Some newspapers allow the letters to be submitted via email as well as by hard copy.



*Photo by Pam Mackey Taylor*

## **Talk Radio Can Be an Environmentalist's Friend**

Environmentalists can embrace talk radio to further environmental protection, education and action! Conservatives are not the only people who can use this strategy. Talk radio shows that employ a more moderate perspective in issues discussion, respect their guests with a pleasant demeanor and regard the callers in a professional manner really do exist.

Environmentalists can challenge positions taken by other callers or guests on the program and promote environmental concepts and positions.

- It is a good idea to listen to the show before you make a call. You will then have an idea of the kinds of issues that are presented, the kinds of callers and positions they usually take and how the host will treat a caller.
- Prior to making the call, be prepared on the topic so that you can speak confidently when you are on the air. If it helps you, prepare an outline or some notes prior to making the call. While on the air, you will need to express your thoughts quickly and concisely. Don't exaggerate and NEVER lie.
- The first person you will probably talk to upon making the call will probably be an assistant to the show. You will need to give your name, the city where you live and a description of your topic. Expect to be put on hold until the show's host can take the call.
- If you get a busy signal, don't give up. Try again. Also, try to dial in a few minutes before the program begins to better ensure that you get to speak on-air.
- Turn your radio volume down before you speak to avoid feedback.
- Speak in normal tones. Try not to speak too fast. If the host tries to provoke you, answer the question professionally; do not get defensive or combative