Advancing Environmental Issues at the Iowa Capitol

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 them about those issues. If they do not hear from their constituents and potential voters, they do not know that the voters are concerned about protecting the environment.

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.

“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.”

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 of 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 https://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, see: www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/house
To find the email address for a senator, see www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/senate

1 Caryl Terrell, “Keys to Effective Lobbying,” Sierra Club
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. 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. The Iowa Chapter lobbyist can provide you more information about visiting the Capitol, at iowa.chapter@sierraclub.org or 515-277-8868.

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

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.

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. To electronically send a letter to the governor, you must use the website www.governor.iowa.gov/constituent-services/register-opinion.

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.