Assignment 3: Write Your Representative
CH 3420: Environmental Chemistry, Plymouth State University

Because science is the pursuit of knowledge, and good decision making requires knowledge, there is often overlap between science and policymaking. As a student of science, you are in the useful position of being able to obtain, understand, and explain scientific information. You are being called upon to use your knowledge and skills to inform decisions on legislation that matter to you!

Background

There are currently different pieces of legislation in the U.S. Senate and in the New Hampshire House of Representatives related to topics covered in Environmental Chemistry: Climate change, and pesticides.

On September 30, 2009, Senator John Kerry (D-MA) introduced Senate bill S.1733, called the "Clean Energy Jobs and American Power Act," which is aimed at addressing climate change, clean energy, and job creating in the U.S. ([http://kerry.senate.gov/cleanenergyjobsandamericanpower/intro.cfm](http://kerry.senate.gov/cleanenergyjobsandamericanpower/intro.cfm)). Several hearing were subsequently held by the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, and on Feb. 2, 2010 the bill was placed on Senate Legislative Calendar under General Orders. Calendar No. 267. Largely due to the Senate's work on other pieces of legislation, no action has been taken on the bill since that time. It is rumored that Senator Kerry is currently working on a re-write of the bill with Senators Joe Lieberman (I-CT) and Lindsey Graham (R-SC).

On December 10, 2009, Representative Suzanne Smith (D-Grafton) introduced HB1456 into the New Hampshire House of Representatives. A public hearing was held January 26, 2010, and on March 17 the bill was referred back to the Environment and Agriculture committee. The bill proposes "establishing a committee to study the use of pesticides, herbicides and their alternatives in residential neighborhoods, school properties, playgrounds and other places children congregate," ultimately aimed at restricting pesticide use in such areas. The Committee is expected to begin studying the issue in June.

These, and many other environmentally-related pieces of legislation, are currently being debated in legislative bodies across the country. As scientists, you may be able to positively contribute to the legislative process as it attempts to address the major issues of your age. As citizens, you should participate in your government.

Assignment:

The assignment is to draft a letter to one of your representatives regarding a piece of environmentally-related legislation. If you are a resident of New Hampshire, you may choose to your New Hampshire representative regarding HB 1456. You may also choose to write your U.S. Senator regarding S.1733. Or you may choose to find another bill under consideration in the U.S. Congress, or the legislative body of your state of residence. Various parts of this assignment include (roughly in this order):

1. Determine who your representative is. For New Hampshire, the relevant websites are:
   House of Representatives: [http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/house/](http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/house/)
   Senate: [http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/senate/](http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/senate/)

   For the U.S. Congress:
   Senate: [http://www.senate.gov/](http://www.senate.gov/)

2. Determine what bill you want to write about.
3. Find information about the bill. You may do various searches on the Internet, but you MUST
consult the actual bill. For U.S. Congressional bills, you may search for the text of the bill at http://www.thomas.gov/. (Note, more information about the Climate Change bill can be found at Kerry's site, listed in the Background). For NH bills, search at http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/bill_status/

Note: You do not have to read the entire bill, but you must familiarize yourself with it enough to speak intelligently about it.

4. Find a relevant article in the peer-reviewed literature.

5. Decide the position you will take in the bill. Note: as a free citizen of this democracy, you may choose to be in support of, or against, any legislation or piece thereof. Your position on the issue will NOT influence your grade on this assignment.

6. Write the letter.

Format: Writing your Representative

This is a letter written to your elected representative. The format should be such that you could sign the letter and mail it as-is. Include the date, addresses, proper salutations, etc. Your language should be formal, polite, and concise. Begin by stating simply who you are and why you are writing in one sentence ("My name is Jeremiah Duncan, a citizen of Plymouth, NH, and I am writing to encourage you to support Senate bill S.1733). Provide support for your position, including information you gleaned from the scientific literature. Be as specific as possible (if you feel that a particular article gives very strong evidence, you may reference it directly and could even include a copy with your letter). Your position will be further supported by describing personal experiences and/or how such legislation would affect you personally. End your letter by stating exactly the action you wish your elected official to take (e.g., "As the Committee considers the issues of residential pesticide use this summer, I would ask you to strongly consider the study linking pesticide use to neurological diseases in children, and then to support any movement restricting pesticide use in New Hampshire"). In some cases, it may be appropriate for you to ask your representative to directly respond to you.

Your letter should be at least four paragraphs long, but should NOT be longer than 2 pages (ideally, it will fit entirely on one page). Use a reasonably normal font (e.g., Times New Roman, 12 point), single or 1.5 spacing (no double spacing!), and borders no larger than 1”.

The Role of the Scientist in Public Discourse

Policymaking is an extremely complex endeavor that should consider all the information available, but it also involves a lot of real people with different needs, desires, and viewpoints. Like it or not, policymakers consider scientists just one group of constituents, and any group that makes a nuisance of itself will be subsequently marginalized. Politics, in other words, requires diplomacy. It is important to remember that you are a scientist AND a citizen, and these are two separate roles. Scientists may possess scientific knowledge, but citizens are those with opinions about how their government should act. As a scientist, you may understand a certain fact, but this does not give you the right to be egotistical or to demand certain actions. The fact that you are a citizen is what gives you the right to voice your opinion. Feel free to exercise that right often, but when you do, be sure you are informed and polite!

Due Date: May 7, Friday at the start of class.

• For the sake of meeting the deadline, the assignment may be submitted electronically via Blackboard. However, a hard-copy must be handed in within a reasonable time after the deadline. Only hard-copies will be graded!

You will be encouraged to actually send your letter to your representative, though this is NOT a requirement. I will be happy to offer edits and suggestions to any letter you wish to send!
Grading
You must hand in:
1. A copy of your letter
2. A copy of the first page of the Bill about which you are writing (submissions to Blackboard may include a PDF of the entire bill)
3. A copy of the first page of the scientific article you find. (submissions to Blackboard may include a PDF of the entire article)

The assignment is worth 50 points and will be based on the quality of your letter (including language and argument) and your providing the other items listed above.

Final Notes:
1. If you require writing assistance, I encourage you to visit the Writing Center, located in the lower level of Lamson Library. The Writing Center serves all types of writers, from basic to high levels, in any discipline, at any point in the writing process.
2. I strongly encourage you to visit the librarians at Lamson Library to assist you in answering the questions in Part 1 and in finding an article of interest to you.