

## **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. In this assignment, you are being called upon to use your knowledge and skills to inform decisions on legislation that matter to you!

### Background

There are always issues regarding the environment being considered by our elected bodies at both the state and federal level. On many issues, legislation has already been drafted, submitted, and sent to the appropriate committees for review. The processes by which various committees consider bills may often be long, involved, and complicated. Committees typically hold several hearings, open a docket for public comment, and finally vote on whether or not to recommend the bill to the main body for a vote. One returned the to full body (i.e. House or Senate), more hearings may be scheduled, the bill may be debated and edited, and finally a vote occurs. At any point in this process, citizens have the right to voice their opinions about the bill.

In the modern day, information about pending bills--including the text of it, actions taken so far, and planned hearings / votes--can be found on the Web. Here are the websites for the relevant bodies in the New Hampshire and the U.S. federal Congresses:

- NH House of Representatives: <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/house/default.htm>
  - Committee on Environment and Agriculture: <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/house/committees/committeedetails.aspx?code=H06>
- NH Senate Energy and Natural Resources: <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/Senate/default.html>
  - Committee on Energy and Natural Resources (no dedicated website)
- US House of Representatives: <http://www.house.gov/>
  - Committee on Energy and Commerce: <http://energycommerce.house.gov/>
  - Committee on Natural Resources: <http://naturalresources.house.gov/>
  - Committee on Science, Space, and Technology: <http://science.house.gov/>
- US Senate: <http://www.senate.gov/>
  - Committee on Energy and Natural Resources: <http://energy.senate.gov/public/>
  - Committee on Environment and Public Works: <http://epw.senate.gov/public>

### *The Role of the Scientist in Public Discours*

Policymaking is an 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 posses 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!

### 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 write 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 (See websites above)
2. Determine what bill you want to write about. Some tips:
  - At the federal level, look at the individual committees' websites to see what bills are being considered
  - At the NH level, go to the bill search site ([http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/bill\\_status/](http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/bill_status/)).
    - Under "General Status" chose either "Senate" or "House" to select the body where the bill is currently being considered.
    - Choose the appropriate committee from the pull-down menu for "Hse Committee" or "Sen Committee"
  - If you are from another state, you may search your perspective state's congress for bills under consideration.
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, search for the text of the bill at <http://www.thomas.gov/>
  - For NH bills, search at [http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/bill\\_status/](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. YOU MUST SUBMIT AN ELECTRONIC COPY OF THE BILL.*
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 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".

Due Date: May 9, Monday at the start of class.

Grading

You must submit:

- Electronic AND hard copies of your letter
- Electronic copy of the bill
- Electronic copy of the peer-reviewed journal 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. Here is the grading rubric:

Writing Quality	15 pts
Letter Content	
Discussion of Bill	5 pts
Statement of Position	5 pts
Argument and supporting info	10 pts
Statement of request	5 pts
Included Items	
Bill (electronic copy)	5 pts
Journal Article (electronic copy)	5 pts
Total:	50 pts

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.
3. 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!