

# Nebraska Congressional Legislative Information:

Provided by: BLET-NE. State Legislative Board

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## Congressman Jeff Fortenberry (1<sup>st</sup> District)

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# Writing to Congress

On occasion every citizen wants to write to Congress

It is your right, and your representatives in Congress do expect to hear from their constituents. In fact, they are often guided by what they receive in the mail.

Don't forget – they are there to represent the people; it is their duty to represent the majority in Congress, to listen to the minority, and to protect the right of all.

A few points to remember:

1. Write your own letter, wire or card. Don't just sign a mimeographed form. Your representatives and senators get a lot of mail: It is obvious when form letters arrive.
2. If you think enough of an issue to write them, be considerate enough of their attention and judgement to put your opinion in your own words.
3. They will pay much more attention to what you think rather than to what you might sign as a printed form.
4. Every man or woman in Congress – representatives and senators – are very alert to public opinion. Give them the courtesy of writing your own opinion. It means much more.

## Effective Letters

Your letters are read. Your senator/congressman wants to hear from you. Legislators tire of hearing from lobbyists only. As a result, one simple letter can have a very large impact.

Here are some suggestions on how to make your letter most effective:

1. **Be brief:** -- Five one-page letters will have more impact than one five-page letter.
2. **Write clearly** – Legislators do not have the time to decipher illegible handwriting.
3. **Identify yourself** – Be sure to mention the state, congressional or legislative district, city or county in which you are a registered voter. Mention your local union affiliation as well.
4. **Write on one issue only** – Keep it to the point.
5. **Be specific** – When writing about legislation, use the bill number (H.R. 10, S. 100) or the title (The Labor Law Reform Act; the White tax reform measure) if you know them. If not, briefly describe the issue that concerns you.
6. **Be truthful** – Take time to find the correct facts and figures. Simple facts will achieve the greatest success.
7. **Use personal experience** – A brief statement of personal experience is always very effective.
8. **Support Added Costs** – Tell the legislator that you would accept and additional taxation that would support expanded programs.
9. **Make it friendly** – Being a legislator is sometimes a lonely and thankless job. Your legislator needs your support and suggestions. When your legislator has done something of which you approve, write a letter of appreciation.
10. **If you don't like what your legislator is proposing, offer a positive and specific alternative** – Propose alternatives or amendments.
11. **Other suggestions for writing letters** – Never use threats, profanity, or insults; never write a form letter or postcard; never misspell your legislator's name.
12. **Ask for a response** – Urge your legislator to take action in support or opposition or whatever action is appropriate. Request (don't demand) a reply to your letter.