

INTRODUCTION

Many Canadian voters feel alienated from the government policy-making process. Members of Parliament in Ottawa and provincial representatives are elected by people just like you and, as a result, they are accountable to and influenced by you as well. This means that we can all be involved in the formation of our country's laws.

WHAT CAN I DO?

The principles of democracy which govern our country give us several ways to become politically active:

The easiest way to exercise your democratic right is simply to vote.

Another easy way to be a part of the political process is to make your views known to your elected representative. You can make a phone call, write a letter, send an e-mail or visit in person. By doing this you will have entered the exciting world of lobbying.

Your Member of Parliament is your official voice in Ottawa. Get to know him/her by volunteering.

You can decide where your political allegiances lie and join a party.

Make your feelings public by writing a letter to the editor of a national or local newspaper.

Circulate a petition to be presented to government. If you don't have time to gather signatures yourself, then take the opportunity to sign one.

Some day, you may even want to consider running for office.

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01. VOTE

If you haven't voted, then you shouldn't be complaining about the representatives other people voted for! Voting is your invitation into the political process and is true 'grassroots' participation in the democratic process.

Canada's governments operate at the national, provincial and municipal levels, and each level holds elections at different times. Nationally, Canada is divided into 308 ridings (starting in 2004), each of which elects one Member of Parliament. Each province is also divided into ridings, which elect provincial representatives. The federal and provincial governments have different responsibilities, though these often overlap. Municipal elections elect a city's mayor, councillors and school board trustees, who are responsible for local government.

To be eligible to vote in Canada, you must be a Canadian citizen and at least 18 years old. Provincial and municipal elections typically require voters to live in the area for six months before the election.

Before the election, make sure you are on the voting list. If you have recently moved to a new constituency, you can contact Elections Canada at 1-800-463-6868 (toll-free in Canada and the United States) to be sure you are correctly listed on the National Register of Electors. For people who are deaf or hard of hearing the TTY number is 1-800-361-8935. You can also register at the poll with valid ID. You must present proof of your identity and residence, or make a sworn statement witnessed by a registered voter.

Provincially, you can call your province's Election Registration office to make sure you are eligible to vote. Find the phone number in the blue pages section of the phone book.

Sometimes it is difficult to make it out to the polls on election day but you do have some options in how to cast your vote. Advance polls are usually open for several days prior to the election – watch your local newspaper for details on advance polls.

You can also vote even if you will not be in your own riding on election day. Electors who will be away from Canada on election day or during the advance polls can register to vote by special mail-in ballot. Contact Elections Canada to find out how you can get a mail-in ballot.

Voting is both a privilege and a responsibility; citizens should take the time to become familiar with the issues and candidates. Whether you are voting for a school board trustee or a member of parliament, remember that this person can have a dramatic impact on your community through the choices he or she makes.



02. CONTACT ELECTED FEDERAL OFFICIALS

Contacting the elected representative for your area is your best opportunity to have an impact on the complicated process of creating and enforcing laws. In Canada it is easy for you to contact your representatives by mail, phone, fax or e-mail.

INTRODUCTION TO CANADA'S GOVERNMENT

Canada's government is based on the British model, and has three branches: **Legislative** (Parliament), **Executive** (the Queen's representatives, the government party, the public service) and **Judicial** (judges). Each plays a role in writing and enforcing Canada's laws.

Parliament consists of the elected House of Commons and the appointed Senate. **The House of Commons** has 308 seats (starting in 2004), and elections are held at least every five years. There is approximately one MP for every 100,000 Canadians. Currently, five different parties are represented in Parliament. The leader of the party with the most people elected becomes Prime Minister.

Senators are appointed by the government and selected from across Canada. Senators represent their individual provinces. The Senate is intended to provide an impartial, critical review of legislation before it is passed. In practice, the appointed Senators rarely make changes to laws. However, they do serve on Committees and make policy recommendations to the Prime Minister. You can contact senators and encourage them to represent your opinions. Find their contact information through Parliament's website: www.parl.gc.ca

Together, the legislative and executive branches create the laws of the land. Ministers propose legislation, which goes through a detailed process of review, debate, examination and amendment through both chambers en route to final approval: Royal Assent. Some bills have been passed in a matter of days, others take years!

The Prime Minister is the "undisputed head of decision making" in

the federal government. He or she appoints most senior government leaders, organizes the government, calls elections, guides the leading political party, manages debates in Cabinet, and represents Canada to the world. The Prime Minister's Office is the guiding force in Canada's government.

CABINET AND COMMITTEES

The Prime Minister selects a number of MPs (currently 28) to form the Cabinet. Each Cabinet member oversees a specific portfolio, such as Defence, Health or Finance. Ministers are selected for their skills and experience, their political beliefs and alliances, and to try to ensure a diverse mix of opinions. These ministers are responsible to all Canadians, so you should write to them about issues you are concerned about.

Opposition parties regularly create a "shadow cabinet" of MPs who track and critique the work of specific Cabinet members. If you disagree with the stand a Cabinet member takes on an issue, you may want to contact the opposition parties and encourage them to offer alternatives to the government's position.

Committees are a key part of making decisions in the government. MPs and Senators form committees to discuss and research various issues and proposed laws. You can make submissions to these Committees, or even make a presentation to them. Find out more by visiting Parliament's website at www.parl.gc.ca.

Some of the most important committees include Justice and Human Rights, Finance, and Health.

Information drawn from the Public Service Commission of Canada website: www.psc-cfp.gc.ca

03. CONTACT ELECTED PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS

You can find your provincial officials through the blue pages in your telephone directory or by contacting one of the following numbers:

ALBERTA

Phone: (780) 427-2711 8am-6pm, Mon-Fri
Toll-Free: 310-0000 (in Alberta only)
Website: www.assembly.ab.ca/lao/mla/index.asp

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Phone: (250) 387-6121 or (604) 660-2421 8am-5pm, Mon-Fri
Toll-Free: 1-800-663-7867 8am-5pm, Mon-Fri
Website: www.legis.gov.bc.ca/mla/index.htm

MANITOBA

Phone: (204) 945-3744 8am- 4:30pm, Mon- Fri
Toll-Free: 1-800-282-8060 8am- 4:30pm, Mon-Fri
Website: www.gov.mb.ca/leg-asmb/dir/dir.html

NEW BRUNSWICK

Phone: (506) 684-7901 8:30am-10pm, Mon-Fri / 10am-5pm, Sat
Website: www.gov.nb.ca/legis/index.asp

NEWFOUNDLAND

Phone: (709) 729-3610 8:30am-1pm, Mon-Fri
Website: www.gov.nf.ca/hoa/members

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Toll-Free: 1-800-661-0784
Website: www.assembly.gov.nt.ca/Members/index.html

NOVA SCOTIA

Phone: (902) 424-5200 8:30am-4:30pm, Mon-Fri
Website: www.gov.ns.ca/legi/housedir/dirha.htm

NUNAVUT

Toll Free 1-888-252-9869 9am-5pm, Mon-Fri.
Website: www.assembly.nu.ca/english/members/MLAs.html

ONTARIO

Phone: (613) 238-3630 or (416) 326-1234 8:30am-5pm, Mon-Fri
Toll free 1-800-268-8758 [613 area code] 8am-5pm, Mon-Fri
Toll-Free: 1-800-267-8097 8:30am-5:30pm, Mon-Fri
Website: www.ontla.on.ca/members/profileindex.htm

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Phone: (902) 368-5050
Toll-Free: 1-800-236-5196 8:30am-5pm, Oct-May 8am-4pm, Jun-Sep
Website: www.gov.pe.ca/leg/members.php3

QUEBEC

Phone: (418) 643-1344 8:30am-4:30pm, Mon-Tues / Thu-Fri
8:30am-3:30pm Wed
Website: www.assnat.qc.ca

SASKATCHEWAN

Phone: (306) 787-2376 8am-5pm, Mon-Fri
Website: www.legassembly.sk.ca/members/

YUKON

Toll-Free: (867) 667-5811 8:30am-5pm, Mon-Fri
Website: www.gov.yk.ca/leg-assembly/mlas/

04. GET TO KNOW YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

Believe it or not, you may be one of the few people with strong enough feelings about an issue to make contact with your elected officials. Often people fall prey to feelings of complacency and cynicism, but it's important to know that your opinions matter to the person you have elected to office.

Even if you can't speak directly to your representative, tallies are kept of constituent opinions received through e-mail, telephone, fax, letters and personal visits, and are reported to the Member. It is one way that constituents keep the Member in touch with public opinion within his/her riding.

VISIT YOUR LOCAL MEMBER'S OFFICE

Call your Member's local office to set up an appointment with your representative. Realize, however, that with the hectic schedule many legislators have to keep, he or she may not always be able to see you personally. If your Member is unavailable, ask to meet with a staff assistant who is knowledgeable about the issue that concerns you. Before you go, make sure you have prepared adequately:

1. Educate yourself about the issue.
2. Have constructive suggestions ready that you feel are reasonable alternatives.
3. If possible, you can even prepare something in writing that you can leave at the office, perhaps a letter detailing your concerns or suggestions. Often legislators do not have the time or resources to gather all the information necessary to cover all facets of an issue. You can be pro-active and helpful by providing him/her with information they may not have access to.

MAKE A TELEPHONE CALL

Your Member's local constituency office has staff to take your calls and relay your opinions. You may even get to speak to your represen-

tative directly. If you don't have the time to write a letter, a phone call will at least get you on the record and bring the matter to the attention of the staff.

You can reach your representative's local constituency office (the number should be in your local telephone directory) or call your member at his/her government office in the capital. When you call the local office, indicate that you want to register a citizen opinion or talk briefly with a staff member who is handling a particular issue. Briefly state your position and ask for a reply from the elected member. As always, be courteous, respectful and polite. Even if you strongly disagree with a stance your member has taken, it will not help your cause to appear inarticulate or rude to the member's assistants.

WRITE A LETTER

If you have a bit of time to put into your lobbying efforts, a letter is a good way to spend it. To make your letter effective, keep these basic principles in mind (see next section for more information):

1. Educate yourself: be informed on the issues.
2. Be concise, constructive and courteous: lengthy, argumentative or rude letters will not help your cause.

SEND AN EMAIL

Sending a brief e-mail message is also another effective way to voice your opinion. You can follow our letter writing guide when writing your email but with one important change: keep it very brief and to the point. Lengthy, rambling e-mails will probably never get read, so say as much as you can in as few words as possible. You can obtain your federal representative's e-mail address by calling 1-800 O CANADA (622-6232), through section 2 of this document, or through familyfacts.ca. For provincial information see section 3.

05. WRITE A LETTER TO A POLITICIAN

When it comes to government policy making, your opinions count—but only if you share them. A letter to your Member of Parliament or provincial representative is one way to make certain your views are considered. A few things to ask yourself:

WHO SHOULD I WRITE?

Concentrate on your own representative. Your Member of Parliament has an obligation to consider your view. MPs are most concerned with what the people who voted for them have to say. Remember, it is your vote that will get them re-elected so they are concerned about your opinion. If you are not sure who your Member is, call 1-800 O-CANADA to find out. ...but don't forget to write the Prime Minister. As government leader, the Prime Minister is accountable to all voters. Cabinet ministers may also be contacted regarding issues within their jurisdiction.

WHAT SHOULD I SAY?

Try to focus on one subject. Your communication will be most effective if you stick to one issue. Generally, the more you say the less you will be heard. For example, if you are writing to learn your MP's views on same-sex marriage and move to a discussion of the Prime Minister's spending habits and negotiations on Aboriginal issues, the main point of your letter will get lost.

Ask the legislator to tell you her/his position on the matter. Will he/she support or oppose this legislation? As your elected representative, your Member has a responsibility to inform you.

HOW SHOULD I WRITE THE LETTER?

Be original. Mass-produced letters or pre-printed postcards do not communicate as effectively as your own words. Form letters usually receive form replies. The effort you make when informing your Member will speak loudly for the strength of your position. Constituents who take half an hour out of a busy day to write a let-

ter are also likely to get out and vote on election day. However, if a form letter is all you have time to send, then do it! It still represents your viewpoint.

Be concise. If possible keep your letter to one page. Two or three page letters may only be 'scanned' and not given the attention your opinion deserves. It will take more effort to condense your ideas into a single page, but it's worth it if you want to be read. Typing your letter will give you more room to write but it is not necessary if you have clear handwriting.

Be constructive. While it is important to indicate the weakness of the proposed change, your letter will be better received if it includes a positive alternative. Letters should, whenever possible, include the bill number or the popular title since there can be many bills concerning any given topic.

Be informative. Unfortunately, it is impossible for your Member to be an expert on every issue legislators deal with. If you have expert knowledge, share it and be a part of the educational process for your Member. You can't assume your Member has as much information as you do, or as much time to investigate it thoroughly. All opinions expressed are important, but those from someone with real experience are a gold mine to conscientious Members. You can also point out the moral issues involved. Legislators get so much mail from special interest groups that they need to hear from citizens who are primarily concerned with what seems right to them on moral grounds.

Be engaging. Communication between you and your Member should be open and non-threatening. Emotional arguments or language that is demanding or aggressive will not advance your cause. While the subject may be emotion-laden, use facts and illustrations to make your point. Statements like "Vote against the bill, I'm bitterly opposed" do not help much. But a letter that says "As a parent I feel this legislation does nothing to promote stronger and healthier families in Canada. Instead, our government must

enact legislation that will..." says much more.

If you disagree with your representative or are complaining about his/her actions on an issue, be mindful of the differences in opinion. Your attitude will inevitably show and it should be polite and respectful. Displaying anger or resentment in a letter will only make it easier to ignore. Your legislator will assume that you wouldn't vote for him even if he did what you ask, and you want him to think of you as a potential supporter. If you ever hope to convince your Member of the rightness of your opinion you must engage him/her in dialogue. An argumentative approach will not allow that to happen.

Feel free to ask for a response from your representative. Request an answer to a specific question or action on a particular issue, but do not be demanding. As your elected representative, your Member has the responsibility to respond to your requests.

Be accurate and courteous. Your name and address should be on both the envelope and letter. Write legibly and spell names accurately. Use proper etiquette. Any cabinet member is called "Honourable" on the envelope and inside address.

A FEW THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

Timing is important. Read the newspaper or check Parliament's Website for dates of scheduled floor votes or committee action. Obviously, your letter should come as early as possible before decisions are made. By doing so it is possible to encourage the legislator to take your position before being influenced by the opposition. The best time to write is when you first learn that Parliament is going to consider the issue.

Be encouraging. When appropriate, say "well done." Your Members of Parliament are human too, and appreciate a word of thanks from people who believe they have done the right thing. Thank your legislator if he/she voted for your position on an issue. Very few constituents bother to do this. It will be appreciated! Also, do this while the vote is still fresh in the Member's mind. If possible, phone after a vote and leave a message of thanks.

MPs are not looking for pen pals. Quality, not quantity, is what counts. Write when you feel prompted, but don't try to instruct your representative on every issue that comes up. Writing once a month or less is a good rule of thumb.

Keep a copy of your letter. Retain and file a copy of your letter and the reply from your representative. They are especially useful should you arrange an interview to discuss your concerns. If you receive a negative response, it helps to have a copy to discuss it

with others.

Network with like-minded people. Join with others, and write letters on behalf of a group. True to the old adage, there is strength in numbers. Plus, you can gain from the experience of others who have already initiated contact with elected representatives. If you've never written a letter to a legislator, hearing of someone else's experience can encourage you to try it yourself.

Follow up. Sending a follow up letter will communicate that the legislator's position is raising serious concerns from constituents. Make these letters thoughtful and polite, but insistent if you feel the issue was not adequately addressed in your legislator's response. Cover at least three elements in follow-up letters:

1. Express thanks for your legislator's time and consideration of the issue.
2. If appropriate, express your viewpoint again.
3. Ask a question or two, so the staff will have to think about the issue and respond. Some suggested questions include: Have you consulted . . . ? Did you know . . . ?

Visit and discuss his/her response to your views. The more attention you pay to an issue the better your chance is to make your legislator understand the importance of addressing the situation.

Above all, do not get discouraged. Remember, your representative needs your help getting re-elected. Your vote and the votes of those within your sphere of influence are important.

HOW TO ADDRESS / GREET / CLOSE

Prime Minister of Canada

The Right Honourable (name), P.C., M.P.,
Prime Minister of Canada,
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Mr./Madam Prime Minister:

Yours sincerely,

*Note: "P.C." indicates member of the Privy Council.
"M.P." indicates Member of Parliament.*

The Premier of a Province

The Honourable (name), M.L.A. (In Quebec - M.N.A. In Ontario - M.P.P. In Newfoundland - M.H.A.)
Premier of the Province of _____

Dear Sir/Madam:

Sincerely,

Member of the Executive Council (Cabinet) of a Province

The Honourable (name), M.L.A. (In Quebec - M.N.A. In Ontario - M.P.P.)

Minister of (area of responsibility)

Dear Sir/Madam:

Yours truly,

Member of the Federal Cabinet and Member of Privy Council

The Honourable (name)

Minister of (area of responsibility)

Privy Council Office

Ottawa, ON K1A 0A3

Dear Sir/Madam:

Sincerely,

Member of the Senate

The Honourable (name)

The Senate

Ottawa, ON K1A 0A4

Dear Sir/Madam:

Sincerely,

Member of the House of Commons

(name), M.P.

House of Commons, Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Sir/Madam:

Sincerely,

Chief Justice or Supreme Court Justices

The Right Honourable The Chief Justice of Canada

Supreme Court of Canada, Ottawa, ON K1A 0J1
or, The Honourable (name), Chief Justice of (province/
territory)

Sir/Madam:

Sincerely,

No postage is needed when sending a letter to the Prime Minister, Governor General, Senators and Members of Parliament at their Parliament Hill offices. However, postage is necessary if you send it to a local constituency office.

SAMPLE LETTER TO A MP

[your name]

[your address]

[today's date]

[name of MP: eg. Michael O'Connor, M.P.]

House of Commons, Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to express my belief that the Justice Committee charged with studying marriage should reaffirm the traditional definition. I am encouraged by the Committee's desire to meet with a wide variety of Canadians on this issue, and to look deeply at the tremendous importance of marriage in our society.

My concern is that some members of parliament are not willing to stand by the promise they made three years ago when they voted overwhelmingly to uphold the definition of marriage as the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others. I encourage you, as my representative in Parliament, to do whatever it takes to defend the existing definition of marriage.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to hearing from you about your opinion and intended course of action.

Sincerely,

[your name]

06. JOIN A POLITICAL PARTY

You can become a member of a political party by contacting the local constituency association of any registered political party. Parties set their own requirements for membership but generally if you are a Canadian citizen or landed immigrant, ordinarily reside in Canada, and are 14 years of age or older you are eligible to join. Membership in most parties is \$10.00 per year.

By becoming a member of a party you help to determine what candidate is chosen to represent your party in your constituency on election day. You can also be a part of sending policy resolutions and delegates to national assemblies where the policy and leadership of the party is decided.

Each constituency association elects an executive from its registered members that will be responsible for its daily operations. The executive of the constituency association is a direct line to your elected representative. It is the hard work of campaign workers that get politicians into office and helps forge relationships that endure beyond election day.

Many citizens also make financial contributions to their party of choice, one of its trust funds, an electoral district association or a candidate. Some provinces also offer tax credits on donations made to political parties. Your local riding association will be able to assist you in determining if your donation is eligible for a tax credit.

The following are not eligible to make a contribution to a registered party, to one of its trust funds, to an electoral district association or to a candidate:

- a) a person who is not a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident as defined in subsection 2(1) of the Immigration Act;
- b) a corporation or an association that does not carry business in Canada;

c) a trade union that does not hold bargaining rights for employees in Canada;

d) a foreign political party; and

e) a foreign government or an agent of one.

You can locate local constituency associations in your area's telephone directory or locate them on the Web using the links below.

FEDERAL POLITICAL PARTIES

Bloc Québécois

1200, av. Papineau
Bureau 055
Montreal, PQ H2K 4R5
Phone: (514) 526-3000
Fax: (514) 526-2868
Email: webmestre.bq@parl.gc.ca
Website: www.blocquebecois.org

Canadian Alliance

#300, 717 7th Ave SW
Calgary, Alberta T2P 0Z3
Phone: 1-888-733-6761 or (403) 269-1990
Fax: (403) 269-4077
Email: info@canadianalliance.ca
Website: www.canadianalliance.ca

Liberal Party

81 Metcalfe Street, Suite 400
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 6M8
Phone: (613) 237-0740
Fax: (613) 235-7208
Website: www.liberal.ca

New Democratic Party

802 - 85 Albert Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 6A4
Phone: (613) 236-3613
Fax: (613) 230-9950
E-mail: ndpadmin@fed.ndp.ca
Website: www.ndp.ca

Progressive Conservative Party of Canada

141 Laurier Avenue West, Suite 806
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5J3
Tel: (613) 238-6111
Fax: (613) 238-7429
Email: pcinfo@pcparty.ca
Website: www.pcparty.ca

PROVINCIAL POLITICAL PARTIES

You can find your provincial and territorial political parties through the Websites listed below, by looking in your local telephone directory or by calling the Inquiry Centre for your province.

Alberta

Liberal Party [www.lpc.ab.ca/en]
Progressive Conservative [www.albertapc.ab.ca]
New Democratic Party [www.newdemocrats.org]

British Columbia

Liberal Party [www.bcliberals.com]
New Democratic Party [www.bc.ndp.ca]
Green Party [www.greenparty.bc.ca]
Unity Party [www.unityparty.bc.ca]

Manitoba

Liberal Party [www.manitobaliberals.ca]
New Democratic Party [www.mb.ndp.ca]
Manitoba Progressive Conservatives [www.pcparty.mb.ca]

New Brunswick

Progressive Conservative [www.pcnb.org]
Liberal Party [www.nblib.nb.ca]
New Democratic Party [www.ndp-ndp.nb.ca]

Newfoundland and Labrador

Progressive Conservative [www.pcparty.nf.net]
Liberal Party [www.liberal.nf.net]
New Democratic Party [www.nf.ndp.ca]

Northwest Territories

No political parties operate at the territorial level in the Northwest Territories. All members of the Assembly are elected as independents.

Nova Scotia

Progressive Conservative [www.pcparty.ns.ca]
Liberal Party [www.liberal.ns.ca]
New Democratic Party [www.ns.ndp.ca]
Nova Scotia Party [www.nsparty.com]

Nunavut

There are no political parties in Nunavut. Members of the Legislature are elected as independents and choose the Premier and Cabinet from among themselves and govern by consensus.

Ontario

Liberal Party [www.ontarioliberal.on.ca]
New Democratic Party [www.ontariondp.on.ca]
Progressive Conservative [www.ontariopc.on.ca]
Family Coalition Party of Ontario [www.familyparty.on.ca]

Prince Edward Island

Liberal Party [www.peiliberals.com]
New Democratic Party [www.isn.net/peindp/peindp.html]
Progressive Conservative [www.pcparty.pe.ca]

Quebec

Parti Quebécois/The Quebec Party [www.pq.org]
Parti Liberal du Quebec/Quebec Liberal Party [www.plq.org]
Action démocratique du Quebec [www.adq.qc.ca]
Equality Party [www.equality.qc.ca]

Saskatchewan

Liberal Party [www.saskliberal.ca]
New Democratic Party [www.saskndp.com]
Saskatchewan Party [www.saskparty.com]

Yukon

Liberal Party [www.yukonliberals.yk.ca]
New Democratic Party [www.yukonweb.com/community/ndp/]
The Yukon Party [www.yukonparty.com]

07. WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Newspapers get many more letters than they can possibly squeeze onto their editorial pages, so yours will have to stand out if it's ever going to make it to the eyes of your neighbours.

Points to keep in mind to help get you published:

Play by the rules. The number one reason letter-writers get rejected is because they think the paper's rules somehow don't apply to them. Those whys and wherefores printed on the opinion page are not avoidable, they're law: maximum number of words allowed, make sure you sign your letter and include your phone number, don't send the text as an e-mail attachment. Violating "the law" is the quickest way to ensure your thoughts go straight from the envelope or inbox to the trash can.

Think local. You're far more likely to catch an editor's eye if you address an issue of local or regional concern than if you comment on the latest buzz in Ottawa. Newspapers are overloaded with national and international news analysis from syndicated and wire-service columnists; what they need are thoughtful takes on backyard issues from hometown residents.

If you must tackle a national topic, scout for ways to cast local light on it. Don't just praise the nationwide study that found abstinence pledges delay teen sex; applaud the local programs that encourage such pledges. Don't just use national statistics to underscore the horror of abortion; find out how many abortions have been performed in your city or county or province, or tell the story of an abortion survivor you know. The closer to home you bring the issue, the less abstract your argument.

Show, don't tell. Forget introductions like, "I am writing this letter to comment on the growing problem of pornography in our society." That's telling them why you're writing, and your

job is to show them: "The harmful effects of pornography have become so evident today that they can no longer be ignored." That kind of straightforward statement keeps even those who disagree with you sticking around for a few more sentences, if only to see how you prove your point.

Remember the facts. Your readers likely do not share your beliefs about morality or the authority of the Bible, so focus on the facts of the issue. Present research, anecdotes and principles, not just a string of Bible passages. Demonstrate why people should agree with you about the issue at hand, even if they don't agree with your religious beliefs.

Speak the truth in love. Sadly, Christians have developed a reputation for being harsh and condemning - the opposite of what God intended. Some of the letters in community newspapers show how this reputation developed: Christians sometimes write hurtful, rude letters. Your letter should speak the truth and change hearts by persuading readers. Take the time to reread your letter, and have a friend or two review it to ensure that your anger or outrage is not expressed in rude terms.

So get to it. Your neighbours are waiting!

Adapted from an article written by Gary Schneeberger, "Letter Rip" Citizen magazine, April 2001

SAMPLE LETTER TO A MP

The sample letter that appears on the next page was published in the *Winnipeg Free Press* on September 14, 2000.

Re: Winnipeg One chair wants trustees to reject parents' petition for classes

To some of us concerned that parents' wishes are not paid enough attention in the educational process, the action proposed by Winnipeg One school board chairman Lori Johnson to prevent extra-curricular Bible instruction is alarming. This action would be illegal and an abuse of the board's powers. The law is clear: Manitoba's Public Schools Act allows for religious instruction when requested by a significant number of parents or guardians.

What, exactly, is the great crisis causing this board to consider such drastic action? Apparently several Child Evangelism Fellowship (CEF) workers, promoting a parent-sponsored extra-curricular Bible class, have stood outside the Inkster school distributing information to students. Other boards have facilitated this information process through parent newsletters or in-class handouts. The Winnipeg One school board has refused to cooperate with CEF by helping to announce the extra-curricular program. The board's action has forced CEF onto the street, thus creating their own crisis.

This is not an issue of overzealous evangelism. Rather it is an issue of respecting the legally protected rights of parents to have significant input into their children's education. In this particular case, the Winnipeg One board appears to have created its own crisis and is now using that crisis to override the religious and academic rights of the parents and students they were elected to represent.

The Winnipeg One board needs to consider its next step carefully. The proposed action sends a dangerous and intolerant message to our children. Seeing our elected officials solve their conflicts by selectively disobeying the law is the last thing this country and our children need.

We encourage the Minister of Education to enforce the Act, and urge the Winnipeg One board to find creative solutions to their differences with Child Evangelism Fellowship, setting a good precedent for Manitoba.

Sincerely,

Jack Smith

08. START A PETITION

Another effective way of communicating public opinion is to lead a petition campaign. Petitioning the government on an issue lets them know how you, and many others, feel about an issue. By asking your elected representative to present it to the government in the House of Commons or provincial legislature, you keep the issue in the public eye.

STEPS TO AN EFFECTIVE PETITION CAMPAIGN

1. Follow correct guidelines for writing a petition (see below).
2. Get a minimum of 25 signatures per petition. The question is often asked whether it is more effective to have many people sign a petition or to submit more petitions with fewer signatures. Clearly, submitting a petition with 500 signatures makes a strong statement. The advantage of submitting several petitions is that the issue is then brought before the House of Commons several times - keeping the issue alive.
3. Visit your member of Parliament and ask if he/or she will present the petition to the government on your behalf. If he/she is unwilling to do so, you may ask another M.P. to do so. When approaching another M.P., it is helpful to include a letter from your own representative stating that they will not present the petition.
4. It is important to ask your M.P. to present the petition orally in the House of Commons rather than just submitting the petition to the Clerk of Petitions. If your MP is willing to do this, ask for a copy of Hansard - the written record of parliamentary debate - to ensure that the petition was indeed presented. Also ask for the government to respond to your petition.
5. Be sure to send a thank-you note to your M.P.

DRAFTING A PETITION

A petition cannot be presented to the House of Commons unless it has first been submitted by a Member of Parliament to the Clerk of Petitions for certification. In order to be certified, the petition must meet certain requirements established by the rules and practices of the House. The following list sets out guidelines for drafting petitions on matters of public concern for the House of Commons. Provincial legislatures vary so you should contact your provincial legislature for specific details. You can find a listing of telephone numbers for provincial inquiry centres in the Contact Elected Officials sections of this document, or on www.familyfacts.ca.

General requirements

1. The petition must be handwritten, typed, printed or photocopied on sheets of paper of usual size, i.e. measuring 21.5 cm x 28 cm (8 1/2 x 11 inches) or 21.5 cm x 35.5 cm (8 1/2 x 14 inches).
2. At the beginning of the petition the words "To the House of Commons" or "To the House of Commons in Parliament assembled" must appear. Petitions to the government of Canada, the Prime Minister, a Minister, or an individual Member of Parliament are not acceptable.
3. The petition must be respectful and use temperate language.
4. The petition must not be altered either by erasing or crossing out words or by adding words.
5. No other matter is to be attached or appended to or written on the petition, whether in the form of additional documents, maps, pictures, news articles, explanatory or supporting statements, or requests for support. A return address is allowed.

6. The petition must concern a subject within the authority of the Parliament of Canada. The petition must not concern a purely provincial or municipal matter or any matter which should be brought before a court of law or a tribunal.

7. The petition must contain a request, called a “prayer,” for Parliament to take some action (or refrain from taking some action) to remedy a grievance. A statement of grievance or a statement of opinion alone cannot be received as a petition. The petition must not, however, demand or insist that Parliament do something.

8. The “prayer” should be clear and to the point. Details which the petitioners think important may be included in the statement of grievance.

9. The “prayer” should avoid directly asking Parliament to do something which would require the expenditure of public funds.

10. Some signatures and addresses should, if possible, appear on the first sheet with the “prayer.” The subject-matter of the petition must be indicated on each of the other sheets containing signatures and addresses.

11. The petition must contain a minimum of 25 valid signatures, each with the address of the petitioner. The signature of a Member of Parliament is not counted.

12. Each petitioner must sign his or her own name directly on the petition and must not sign for anyone else. Names should be signed, not printed. Signatures cannot be attached to a sheet (taped or pasted on) or photocopied onto it. If a petitioner cannot sign because of illness or a disability, this must be noted on the petition and the note signed by a witness.

13. The petitioner’s address must be written directly on the petition and not pasted on or reproduced. The petitioner may give his or her full home address or simply the city and province.

14. Aliens not resident in Canada cannot petition the House of Commons of Canada.

15. The recommended form of a petition to the House of Commons is set out below.

SAMPLE PETITION

A PETITION CONCERNING CHILD PORNOGRAPHY TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS IN PARLIAMENT ASSEMBLED

We, the undersigned residents of Canada, draw the attention of the House to the following:

THAT the creation and use of child pornography is condemned by the clear majority of Canadians.

THAT the courts have not applied the current child pornography law in a way which makes it clear that such exploitation of children will always be met with swift punishment.

THEREFORE, your petitioners call upon Parliament to protect our children by taking all necessary steps to ensure that all materials which promote or glorify pedophilia or sado-masochistic activities involving children are outlawed.

SIGNATURE (sign your own name - do not print)	ADDRESS (give your full home address or your city and province)

09. BECOME AN ADVOCATE

Dictionary entry:

Ad | vo | cate - noun. 1. person who supports or speaks in favor; 2. champion; 3. backer; 4. upholder; 5. proponent.

Many people think that to be a 'lobbyist' you have to move to Ottawa and take up residence on the doorstep of Parliament. This is not so. In fact, just by telephoning or writing a simple letter or e-mail to express your concerns to your MP or provincial representative, you have become a lobbyist – an advocate for your community. There are many ways to influence the policy-making process, and they are easier than you think!

Political activism starts first by exercising your right to vote for your candidate of choice and then holding him/her accountable to the promises made during the election campaign. What you think and say really does count so don't hesitate to make it known.

Educate yourself about the issues at hand. Federal and provincial governments deal with family related issues throughout the legislative session. Focus on the Family offers a free e-mail news service of issues affecting the family. To subscribe to this service, go to familyfacts.ca and enter your email address in the space provided.

Join an action group – get connected with like-minded citizens in your area. Many special interest groups are involved in advocacy at the federal and provincial levels. For more information, contact our Family's Policy Department [research@fotf.ca] if you are interested in becoming more politically active.

10. RUN FOR OFFICE

The following information is courtesy of Elections Canada.

ELIGIBILITY

The right to be a candidate in a federal election is protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The procedures and responsibilities are spelled out in the Canada Election Act (more information available at <http://www.elections.ca>).

Unless specifically declared to be ineligible under section 65 of the Canada Elections Act, any person qualified to vote may run for election. That is, every Canadian citizen who is at least 18 years of age on the date he or she files nomination papers is eligible to be a candidate. A candidate may seek election in only one electoral district at a time; however, the candidate need not be a registered voter or even reside in that electoral district.

NOMINATION

A candidate's first official duty is to appoint an official agent and an auditor. The official agent must be appointed before the campaign incurs expenses for goods and services related to the election, or the candidate accepts contributions.

As soon as possible after an election is called, every person who has decided to be a candidate in that election and who has chosen an official agent and an auditor must obtain nomination papers (form EC 20010) from the returning officer of the electoral district in which that person intends to be a candidate. The nomination papers must be signed before a witness by at least 100 persons who are electors entitled to vote in the electoral district in which the candidate is seeking nomination. (In the case of the larger or remote electoral districts listed in Schedule 3 of the Act, the required minimum number of signatures is 50.)

The nomination papers must then be submitted to the returning officer, with a witnessed declaration signed by the candidate, stat-

ing that he or she accepts the nomination, and statements signed by the official agent and the auditor, indicating consent to act in those capacities. A candidate must also provide his or her name and permanent address and those of the official agent, together with the name and business address of the auditor.

When a candidate is endorsed by a political party and wishes to have the party's name appear under the candidate's name on the ballot, he or she must file a letter of endorsement signed by the leader of the party (or, in a general election, by his or her representative), when filing the nomination papers. If no such letter is filed, candidates must indicate on the nomination papers whether they wish to be designated on the ballot by the term "independent," or to have no designation appear. In a general election, a political party's name may accompany the candidate's name on the ballot only if the party endorses confirmed candidates in at least 12 ridings. In the case of a by-election, the party must have endorsed confirmed candidates in at least 12 ridings during the preceding general election.

The nomination papers and all related documents must be submitted to the returning officer after the returning officer publishes the Notice of Election and before the close of nominations, at 2:00 p.m. on Monday, the 21st day before election day. Candidates who are unable to get to the office of the returning officer have the option of making other arrangements to file their nomination papers. (Candidates who change their minds have until 5:00 p.m. on nomination day to withdraw.) Finally, candidates are required to pay a deposit of \$1,000 as a guarantee that they will comply with the conditions and obligations inherent in official nomination (this is reimbursed if their election expenses returns and unused official receipts are submitted within the required time).

After receiving the nomination papers, the returning officer has 48 hours to review them and, in particular, to confirm that the persons supporting the candidacy are electors entitled to vote in that electoral district. To confirm that 100 (or 50, as appropriate) qualified

electors signed the nomination papers, the returning officer will first check to see whether the persons supporting the candidate are registered on the voters lists. If sufficient registered electors are found, the verification process is complete. If the returning officer does not find sufficient registered electors, he or she will proceed to the second step, which is to verify that each address provided lies within the electoral district.

To ensure a smooth and speedy nomination process, prospective candidates are encouraged to accommodate the review by taking the following precautions when preparing their nomination papers.

File as early as possible, so that there is sufficient time to correct the nomination papers if the returning officer finds they are incomplete.

Ensure that the names and addresses of electors supporting the candidate are as legible, complete and clear as possible. This will help speed up the verification process and allow the returning officer to confirm the candidate's nomination quickly.

Provide more than the required number of signatures, so that if there are difficulties in confirming the qualifications of some supporters, there will still be sufficient names to continue the process and reach the threshold of 100 (or 50, as required).

The returning officer will telephone the candidate or official agent periodically during the 48-hour period, to provide progress reports on the review of the nomination papers.

Following the review, the returning officer will accept or reject each nomination. If a nomination is rejected, a candidate may present new nomination papers up to the time that nominations close. Each new or corrected set of nomination papers will be reviewed within 48 hours.

FINANCING

Expenses limits, contributions and payment

One of the objectives of the Canada Elections Act is to limit candidates' election expenses to ensure a level playing field for candidates. Election expenses are expenses incurred during an election to directly promote or oppose a registered political party or to elect a particular candidate, regardless of when the goods and services are acquired or paid for. Expenses include amounts paid, liabilities incurred, and the commercial value of goods and services donated or acquired

at less than commercial value.

Under the Act, the limit on allowable expenses is determined on the basis of the number of registered electors on either the preliminary or revised voters lists for the riding where the candidacy occurs, whichever is greater. The limit is raised in certain circumstances.

For a general election, in electoral districts where there are fewer electors than the national average, the Act adjusts the number of electors upward.

For a by-election, if the number of electors on the lists in a riding is less than the national average in the preceding general election, the Act adjusts the number of electors upward.

Where the number of electors on the lists in a riding is less than 10 per square kilometre, the base amount is increased.

If an election is postponed following the death of a candidate endorsed by a registered party, all candidates at this "postponed election" are entitled to election expenses limits equal to 1.5 times the amount normally stipulated.

The candidate and the official agent are required to comply with the provisions respecting prohibited contribution sources. They may not accept contributions from persons who are not Canadian citizens or permanent residents of Canada, from corporations or associations not carrying on business in Canada, from unions not entitled to bargain collectively in Canada, or from foreign political parties, foreign states or their representatives.

Only the candidate and the candidate's official agent may pay the candidate's personal expenses. Campaign-related expenses may only be paid by the candidate's official agent, except for petty expenses, if the official agent has provided written authorization.

Official receipts

Once a candidate's nomination papers are accepted, the official agent may request and obtain pre-numbered official receipts. The agent may issue a receipt for each monetary contribution received in the period starting with the day on which the candidate is officially nominated with the returning officer and continuing for the rest of the election period. The official agent is entirely responsible for the proper use of the official receipts for income tax credit purposes under the Income Tax Act.

Records and returns

The official agent is required to keep a record of all contributions received and of all expenses incurred so they may be verified by the candidate's auditor. (This record must be retained for at least two years after the end of the year in which the election is held.) The official agent is also required to file with the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (Taxation) a report of all contributions received and all official receipts issued. Furthermore, the official agent must file a return with the returning officer, disclosing all contributions received and all election expenses incurred, using the forms prescribed by the Chief Electoral Officer.

Reimbursement

A candidate who is elected or receives at least 15 percent of the valid votes cast in his or her riding at an election is sent a reimbursement of 15 percent of the expenses limit for that riding shortly after the return of the writs. If such candidates also comply with all the post-election requirements of the Act, they receive a second installment, which represents a reimbursement of 50 percent of actual election and personal expenses paid, minus the amount they have already received, to a maximum of 50 percent of the election expenses limit for their ridings.

Candidates are reimbursed the full amount of their \$1 000 deposit if they submit the required reports and other documents required by the Act, within the time prescribed.

Expenses

The candidate must provide the official agent with a statement of personal expenses and make a declaration concerning the electoral campaign return prepared by the official agent. The latter, as campaign treasurer, is responsible for all financial aspects of the campaign. For example, the agent must receive all campaign contributions, deposit them in a designated account, and make or authorize all disbursements. The agent must also keep a record of all receipts and disbursements, prepare and submit all financial reports, and sign and issue all receipts for income tax credit purposes.

The auditor must examine all accounting entries, audit the candidate's election expenses return, and report on the findings of the audit.

OFFENCES AND PENALTIES

A person found guilty of an infraction of the Act may be subject to a fine and to a period of imprisonment, as provided for in the Act. Further, the Act defines some offences as "corrupt practices" or "illegal practices." For these specified offences, penalties may include, in addition to any other sentence, loss of the right to be a candidate for a period of five or seven years. One example of an illegal practice under the Canada Elections Act is the case of a candidate, or the official agent, or any person authorized by a candidate who willfully exceeds the allowable limit for election expenses.

Since candidates may be held liable for actions taken by their workers and agents, candidates and their official agents must use extreme caution when delegating their responsibilities and authority.

For more information, please contact:

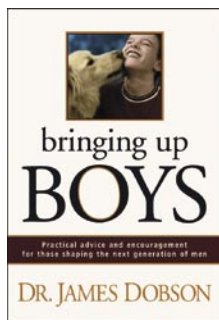
Elections Canada
257 Slater Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0M6

Phone: 1-800-463-6868 toll-free in Canada and the US, 001-800-514-6868 toll-free in Mexico and (613) 993-2975 from anywhere in the world. For people who are deaf or hard of hearing: TTY 1-800-361-8935 toll-free in Canada and the US.

Website: www.elections.ca

11. RESOURCES

BRINGING UP BOYS

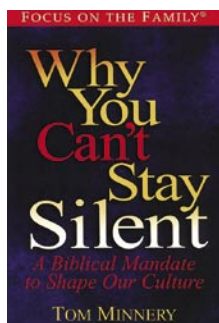


Boys are different! But with pressure to be gender neutral, many try to mold children into a one-size-fits-all model. Dr. Dobson explains why boys are the way they are, how to understand their emotional and physical development, and how best to motivate them into becoming godly men.

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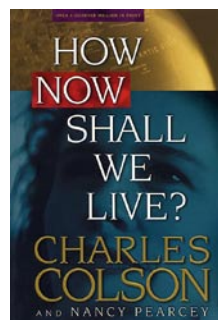
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If you have more questions or concerns about specific issues, please call, write or email.

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