



**COFFEE CAMPAIGN
FOR FAIR ELECTIONS**

Write a Letter to the Editor and help fix Money in Politics

Newspaper LTE's are usually short comments that make one simple point. They are usually a response to something that has appeared on the editorial page or in a news story. In our case, we want to write a letter based on our meeting (or our attempted meeting) with our member of Congress.

Most newspapers get many more letters than they run. And because space is usually at a premium in a newspaper, it's worth investing the time to write a short one ("Sorry this letter is so long, I didn't have time to write a shorter one. - Mark Twain).

Write from the heart and your passion will come through. Keep the following points in mind:

1. **Be specific.** Mention how many times you tried to contact your congressperson, and what response you received.
2. **Be polite.** Civility gives you credibility, and makes it clear you're in the "right."
3. **Use facts and figures** to back up your arguments.
4. **State your qualifications,** "I called Rep. Tonedead on behalf of the 200 active members of the local Coffee Party, and..."
5. **Be original.** Use your own voice. "We simply want to meet for 15 minutes with our member of Congress.
6. **Send to more than one newspaper,** if appropriate. Smaller papers print letters too.
7. **Save a copy.** Just in case they edit it, you'll know exactly how it was changed.
8. **Other platforms.** There are weekly and monthly magazines. There are internet web sites, blogs, Usenet newsgroups, and chatrooms. Express yourself, in friendly terms, in conversations with friends or in social situations.

Sample LTEs based on your Coffee with Congress

Use your own experience to chronicle what happened when you met or tried to meet with your rep.

- Over the past 3 weeks, I have tried 4 times to meet with Rep. Tonedead or a member of his staff. Members of the Riverbank Coffee Party want to express our outrage against the Supreme Court case *Citizens United v. FEC* and to urge him to vote for the Fair Elections Now Act. Every time one of us calls, we get another excuse not to meet with us. Is this because our Rep is too busy with donors and lobbyists to even meet with his constituents?
- Last week, a group of people from the Riverbank Coffee Party met with Representative Wright to express our outrage against the Supreme Court case *Citizens United v. FEC* and to urge him to vote for the Fair Elections Now Act. While he would not commit to vote for this measure, we can say that he listened to our civil, rational, arguments in favor of this bill. We intend to continue this dialog with members of his staff in hope that we can convince him this is in everyone's best interest.
- As a member of the Riverbank Coffee Party, I want to commend Representative Wright about his co-sponsorship of Fair Elections Now Act. At our meeting with him on August 23, he listened to our civil, rational, arguments in favor of this bill and agreed to do what is right for our country instead of what his partisan advisers are telling him to do. We applaud his political courage.

Sample language to use in any letter in support of Fair Elections

Take a look below at some sample letters below.

**You may wish to use these as a starting point for your own generic
LTE on money in politics.**

- In Citizens United v. FEC, the Court rejected well over twenty years of settled election law precedent to suddenly 'discover' first amendment "rights" for corporations and unions. Because the Court chose, in its ruling, to blur the distinction between natural persons and corporations, candidates now face the breathtaking prospect of having to run against the unfettered advertising power of corporate treasuries. The Fair Elections Now Act offers an essential step in restoring our government so it once again listens to its citizens.
- Thanks to Citizens United v. FEC, the voices of regular Americans, already barely heard through the din of the current cacophony of moneyed special interests, have been even further silenced. While we cannot silence the booming megaphones of moneyed interests, we can certainly take steps to give public servants a choice in whether or not to participate in the current special-interest-funded campaign finance system. Congress must pass the Fair Elections Now Act.
- The money in politics problem does not come just from some rotten apples in the barrel. The problem is that the "barrel" itself is rotten. With special-interest-based campaign financing, competitive races give candidates no choice but to spend huge amounts of time raising money, and donors are not prone to contribute unless their legitimate interests have a chance of being heard, which requires even more time. This rotting influence may seem innocent to those conducting normal legislative business. But it is severely damaging the representation system so important to our democracy. The only viable remedy is to bring in a new "barrel". Congress must pass the Fair Elections Now Act.

- The United States needs a voluntary system of campaign finance that frees candidates from the rigors of incessant fund raising. Arizona and Maine state elections have worked this way for over a decade. Over 80% of Maine's sitting legislature ran using their state's Clean Election system. Over half of Arizona's legislature and statewide officeholders ran on the Arizona Clean Elections system. Numerous polls from both of these states show that legislators and voters from both major political parties are overwhelmingly in favor of these systems. The U.S. Congress should follow the lead of these states and pass the federal Fair Elections Now Act.
- If political campaigns are a public service and not simply the self-aggrandizement of narcissists, funding them is as legitimate as the public paying for any other expense related to holding office. Americans would never consider having special interests pay the salaries of members of Congress – they are paid by the public for whom they act. Why, then, do we accept special interests paying many times their salaries for their election campaigns? Americans have shown in numerous polls that voters will see tax dollars spent this way as an investment in responsive government. Congress should honor the overwhelming majority opinion of the American people and pass the federal Fair Elections Now Act.