



**Legislative Update – Issue # 3  
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**A Message from ARRL President Kay Craigie, N3KN**

2011 has been an unusually active year for the ARRL's legislative advocacy program. No threat to Amateur spectrum privileges is ever good news. However, the surprise inclusion of a threat to most of the 70 cm band in H.R. 607 resulted in the kind of membership response that bodes well for future occasions when Amateur Radio's interests are at risk. Software for generating letters addressed to legislators and a video explaining the problem with H.R. 607 were created by volunteers and put to good use by thousands of members. We did it in 2011. We can do it again.

There certainly will be future occasions when we need high-volume, high-quality advocacy response. There have been many legislative challenges to Amateur Radio in the past, not just to particular spectrum privileges but sometimes to our very existence as a radio service. The first challenge actually happened during World War I. Fortunately, members of a brand-new organization called the American Radio Relay League responded to its call to write to Congress.

When we advocate today for Amateur Radio to our legislators on Capitol Hill, whether through personal visits or via letter-writing, we are doing something that links us back through the years to the hams who spoke out to Congress when the ARRL and Amateur Radio were new.

We have advocacy resources today that our predecessors couldn't have imagined. The most important resource, of course, will always be the well-informed League member. Please encourage your friends to subscribe to this newsletter and to join you in the ARRL's legislative action program. It is by working together that we are such an effective advocate for Amateur Radio.

73,

Kay Craigie N3KN  
President, ARRL

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## Letters are Important to Congress: If You Get Them to the Right Person!

[Editor's note: One of the most commonly asked questions about the ARRL Grassroots and Legislative Action programs is "Why does the League ask that we send our letters to their Washington representative instead of directly to our Members of Congress?" We asked *John Chwat, President of Chwat & Co – the League's representative in DC* – if he would answer that question for ARRL's membership. Here is his response.]

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Each US House and Senate office has staff devoted to answering constituent letters, and informing their "boss" how their district feels regarding legislative or policy matters. In some cases, letters are counted to signify a large interest on the part of constituents. This technique has been effectively employed over the years by ARRL as Amateur Radio licensees respond when asked for letters on a given legislative issue. The thousands of letters delivered to individual Congressional offices recently on H.R. 607 are the most recent example of how this strategy can be successful. In the past, letters have made great impact on many issues ranging from proposed license fees for Amateur Radio licensees (which was defeated by grassroots letter writing and visits) to support for a Homeland Security Department study on Amateur Radio capabilities.

Letters are not merely read and counted. If they properly identify a specific legislative or policy issue, they can have an influence on a member of the House or Senate. ***It is critical in the Congressional letter writing process, however, to get the right letter to the right person to have an impact.*** Since 9/11, letters that are mailed directly to Congress are delayed for security and safety reasons - and delay in the legislative process can mean the difference of passage or defeat of legislation.

There are three imperative steps in a successful letter writing process:

- 1) You must have a well written letter;
- 2) You must know how best to get that letter to the right official on the Hill; and
- 3) You must have a plan to follow-up on those letters.

A majority of ARRL members are not able to schedule a personal meeting with their legislators or their staff. The next best thing that you can do is write your elected officials to inform them of your position on a topic. Letters are among the most effective tools in communicating with your elected representatives. They are read, circulated among staff and their member of Congress and are usually counted to help form a decision. However, elected officials receive a massive amount of mail each day, so it is important to make your letter stand out by making it ***personal, local*** and ***concise!***

The key to being effective in your letter to a Congressman or Senator's office is to ensure your voice must be heard above all other letters coming into their offices every day. The most compelling and effective letters combine a thoughtful approach to policy issues with a careful explanation of why it's important to you. Why does a well-argued letter have more impact than a petition with a hundred signatures? Because members of Congress and their staff recognize the time and energy spent writing a thoughtful letter. It sends a signal that the constituent really cares about the issue – and perhaps cares even more than the constituents who simply signed their names to a petition or form letter.



When drafting your letter, keep these guidelines in mind:

- **Use letterhead stationery if possible.**
- **Make sure you are writing to the lawmaker representing your district.** A majority of lawmakers will not answer mail if it is not from a constituent.
- **Make sure to include your own return address** in the letter, if it is not in the letterhead.
- **Address the letter correctly.** Double check addresses and spellings.
- **State the reason for writing and identify the subject clearly in the first paragraph.** If you are writing about a particular piece of legislation, use the bill number and title, if available, and be sure to state your position or request for a specific action.
- **Keep your comments short and to the point and confine the letter to one subject.** If you have strong views on a number of topics you want to bring up with your elected representatives, write individual letters for each topic. *If possible, keep the letter to one page.*
- **Spell things out, literally.** Always remember to spell out all the acronyms the first time you use them. You know what ARRL stands for, but the reader of your request may not.
- **Explain how the issue would affect you, your interests and your community.** Make your correspondence stand out. The impact to an effective written communications is ensuring that the reader thinks about what you have to say. Legislators frequently quote interesting constituent letters during speeches. Provide them with real stories and useful quotes.
- **If you know how the lawmaker stands on the issue, acknowledge this in your letter.** Make your opponents arguments, and make your counter-arguments. Try fairly presenting the other side's argument and then explain why you have a stronger counter-argument.
- **Always ask for a response!**
- **Be sure to thank the legislators for their time and effort on your behalf.**

The ARRL has developed a process to have letters sent by mail, fax or email to our office close to Capitol Hill. When we receive your letter, we log it in, make a copy, then **hand deliver** to the US House or Senate office. One key to having the letter make an impact is to deliver it to the right staff person dealing with our issues. The value of that face-time can not be over-emphasized. At times an ARRL member may send their letter to their local Congressional District offices. While physically closer to the ARRL member, in most cases local district staff does not deal with activity on the Hill, but rather handles local constituent case matters. The District staffs usually defer to their DC staffs on policy issues.

Almost every elected legislative official has a web site where you can email in your concern or complete a web-form which is submitted. While convenient, these methods of contacting your legislator do not have the same impact as a signed, personal letter from a constituent who is motivated. There is no real substitute for the personally signed letter from a voter!

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# Legislation Status

## H.R. 607

While H.R. 607 is still officially alive in the House of Representatives, it is not considered to likely make it out of Committee for consideration. The thousands of letters sent from ARRL Members such as yourself let members of Congress loudly hear your objections to losing a significant portion of our 70-cm allocation very clearly.

When a bill is going to be formally considered by a House committee, it goes through what is called a “mark-up” session before it begins the process of hearings and potential votes. During a mark-up session, members of the committee of jurisdiction and other interested members of the House may offer amendments and changes to the bill. Once a bill is marked-up, any further changes are done by the formal rules and procedures of the House and Senate. At this time, H.R. 607 is not scheduled for a mark-up session or even for debate.

## S. 191 / H.R. 81

The ARRL is still promoting S. 191 and H.R. 81 – “*the Amateur Radio Emergency Communications Enhancement Act of 2011*.” While not companion bills, both would achieve the similar purpose. Both bills direct the Department of Homeland Security to undertake a study to determine how private land use restrictions, so-called CC&Rs, impact Amateur Radio’s capability to support emergency management and public safety officials in emergencies.

As stated in S. 191, the scope of this legislation is to:

“(1) include a review of the importance of amateur radio emergency communications in furtherance of homeland security missions relating to disasters, severe weather, and other threats to lives and property in the United States, as well as recommendations for--

- (A) enhancements in the voluntary deployment of amateur radio licensees in disaster and emergency communications and disaster relief efforts; and
  - (B) improved integration of amateur radio operators in planning and furtherance of the Department of Homeland Security initiatives; and
- (2) (A) identify impediments to enhanced Amateur Radio Service communications, such as the effects of unreasonable or unnecessary private land use regulations on residential antenna installations; and
- (B) make recommendations regarding such impediments for consideration by other Federal departments, agencies, and Congress.”

S. 191, introduced by Senator Joe Lieberman of CT and cosponsored by Senator Susan Collins of ME is the same bill that was unanimously approved by the Senate in the last session but died in committee in the House. At this time it is being held for action in the Senate. H.R. 81 is the same bill previously introduced by Congresswoman Sheila Jackson-Lee and is pending in committee in the House.

The ARRL is focusing its activities on S. 191 at this time. Once either bill begins moving in its chamber of Congress, we will be contacting the ARRL members to become involved in a letter-writing campaign, similar to your efforts displayed earlier in 2011 with H.R. 607. Watch the ARRL Web or for a future issue of *Legislative Update* when there is a call for action.