

Congressmen urge letters, phone calls

By JANE LEHMAN
Of the Emerald

If yelling at the T.V. set during the evening news doesn't seem to be the most effective means for the average citizen to influence national politics, Oregon's congressional delegation can offer a few suggestions.

The options range from letters and telegrams to phone calls and personal chats. However, reactions to each method differ among the offices of Rep. Jim Weaver, Sen. Bob Packwood and Sen. Mark Hatfield.

Topping the list is written correspondence.

"The most effective thing anyone can do is write a personal letter," says Dave Fidanque, a Weaver press aid.

"Mail is the only constant daily contact with the individual in Oregon," says Pat McConahay, a new assistant in Packwood's Washington, D.C. office. "It may very well be the backbone of our whole operation here."

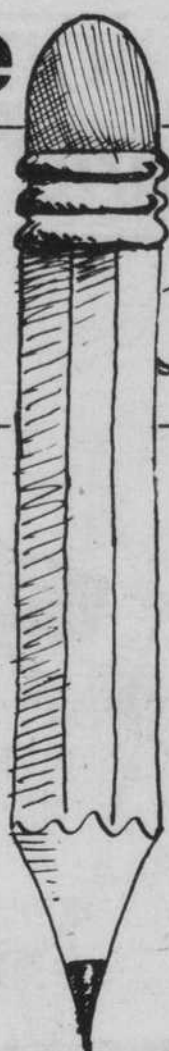
Letters also appear to be one of

the more popular forms of correspondence. Weaver's mailbox is stuffed with up to 300 pieces of mail a day. The post office delivers between 1,000 to 3,000 letters to Packwood. And, on a recent "exceptional day," Hatfield said he was bombarded with 6,200 letters.

All three congressmen agree they are unimpressed with "form letter" or "pre-printed postcard" mail.

"We don't like the instigated type of mail. It's not personal and we don't feel the person put as much effort into it," says McConahay.

Dear Senator



standardized mail matter a bit differently.

"Our policy on form letters is to answer one with a form letter of our own," says Nancy Schowalter, a Washington, D.C. press aid. "If we feel a letter is out of a little group, say 10 postcards each person, we won't count them in our tabulations," she continues.

However, personalized letters do command a response from each of the three congressmen.

Both Weaver's and Packwood's staffs read the incoming mail, draft responses to it and then turn it over for their bosses' review and signature.

Hatfield says he "responds personally" to his constituents' mail.

"I am the leader in the entire U.S. Senate for prompt response," says Hatfield, claiming he has replies in the mail within 48 hours.

Hatfield's office also goes one step further. Recently his staff picked out 300 letters on the Panama Canal issue and personally visited with the senders in their homes.

"We strongly believe in the accessibility of the Senate," says Gerry Frank, Hatfield's administrative assistant.

The content of the mail also bears significantly on a congressman's response to it. Hatfield explains he has some reservations about the emotional content characterizing correspondence he is receiving on the Panama Canal issue.

For example, Hatfield relates the following letter. "I thought you were a born again believer. But now I know, because of your position of the Panama Canal, you aren't. How can you sleep at nights?"

But, he hastened to point out that "behind all the rhetoric, are the deep seated feelings, many of the negative towards government, in America today."

Nothing will get the mail to a Congressman faster than the correct address. Letters can be sent to Rep. Jim Weaver, 1238 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515; Sen. Bob Packwood, 1317 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510; or Sen. Mark Hatfield, 463 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510.

If time is of the essence, Fidanque recommends sending a telegram. "We get doves and doves of telegrams before critical votes," he says.

It is simple enough to place an "opinionogram," according to Betty Reed, manager of Eugene's Western Union office.

For \$2, a person can send a 15-word message (name and address are free) to any elected official in Washington, D.C. that will be received the same day, says Reed.

This differs from a mail-o-gram, which consists of a message of up to 100 words. The \$2.75 communicate arrives the next day.

When faced with time constraints another possibility is the telephone call. According to Fidanque, Weaver's office doesn't receive too many phone calls. "But if we do, I take care of those immediately."

Hatfield's office is also amenable to phone calls.

"We're always happy to get them," says Frank. "We pay a lot of attention to those."

But dialing up Packwood won't get you too far.

"The Senator wouldn't take the call, but it would be handled by staff," says McConahay. "If we get a deluge of phone calls, though, it could very well backfire. There is no way our legislative assistants and staff aides could handle that."

The most personalized option for establishing communication with your Congressman is by personal appointment, but those are rare.

"We try to get people in to see Hatfield personally, but it's difficult since we set up his schedule weeks in advance," says Frank.

Whether by mail, wire, phone or appointment, it would appear it's a lot more rewarding to get through to your congressman than to your T.V. set.

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