

Welcome to
Judaism & Current Events

Effecting Change:
Speaking Out & Reaching Out
7/7/2020

Moderators: Marcy Hotz & Pati Allen Brickman
Congregation Emanu-El of Waukesha

Outline/Agenda

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A Prayer for Peace in Times of Trouble

Lord, give us peace that we may shine brightly in a dark world. Grant us the courage to live faithfully to our highest values even in the midst of hard times. Let our faith in each other be the beginning of wisdom and compassion rather than allowing fear to drive our actions.

Help us to live strongly in the midst of a world that needs to know peace. We pray for our brothers and sisters of the world, for we are of one family.

Show us mercy and heal those who are suffering in times of trouble and plague. Most of all, inspire us to restore the world and make all things new.

Amen.

Guidelines

- This is a discussion, not a debate. The purpose is *not* to win an argument, but to hear many points of view and explore many options and solutions.
- Everyone is encouraged to participate. It is always OK to "pass" if you are asked to share.
- No one or two individuals should dominate a discussion. If you have already voiced your thoughts, let others have an opportunity.
- Raise your hand to signify your wish to speak. The Moderator will call on you. Ideally, one person speaks at a time. Keep interjections to a minimum. If you think you will forget an idea that comes to mind, write it down.
- Please fact-check your sources. We don't want to give oxygen to unverifiable information.
- Listen to and respect other points of view.
- Do your best to understand the pros and cons of every opinion, not just those you agree with. Be as objective and open-minded as you can be.
- Seek first to understand, not to be understood. Ask questions to seek clarification. Be thoughtful. Be kind.



CEEW wishes you to note:

- By consensus, the board recognizes that a group of members decided to hold their own forum on Judaism & Current Events.
- Views expressed during conversations may not necessarily be those of CEEW.

**URJ Statement:
Advocacy is Central to Reform Judaism**

(from the URJ website: <https://urj.org/why-advocacy-central-reform-judaism-1>)

"Reform Jews are committed to social justice. Even as Reform Jews embrace ritual, prayer, and ceremony more than ever, we continue to see social justice as the jewel in the Reform Jewish crown. Like the prophets, we never forget that God is concerned about the everyday and that the blights of society take precedence over the mysteries of heaven. A Reform synagogue that does not alleviate the anguish of the suffering is a contradiction in terms." - Rabbi Eric Yoffie, speech to the UAHC Executive Committee, February 1998

Reform Judaism stands for certain principles, and those who join our congregations take pride in our long history of “speaking truth to power.” Just as most members know that a hallmark of Reform Judaism is an openness to the “other” ... they should also know that there will be a strong social action component – mitzvah days, collection drives, social justice sermons, and education about current issues of concern. And it should be expected that through our congregations we will make a collective effort to bring our progressive, Reform Jewish values to bear in the community at large. We will be engaged on issues of local, national and global concern; we will participate in interfaith coalitions and activities; we will speak out on behalf of the vulnerable; and we will seek justice for all. This is who we are.

URJ Statement:

The idea that people of faith have a mandate to bring their values into the public arena is not unique to the Reform Movement. There is a long tradition of faith groups “speaking truth to power” and advocating for social change, and every major religious organization in American life participates in this civic exercise. Religious voices have been central in the major social justice movements throughout our nation’s history, from the abolitionist movement to those involved with desegregation and civil rights. In the international arena as well, faith groups have led the way in advocating for nuclear disarmament, international aid and human rights around the world.

This is not an easy time to stand up to be counted. We are challenged by an overwhelming number of issues, each one central to our understanding of the prophetic message of our faith and critical to creating the kind of society we wish to bequeath to those who follow us. And not only are we overwhelmed by the sheer scope of the issues that are before us, but we are confronted by those who claim to speak in the name of faith, but who offer a different version of what God expects of us; those who proclaim themselves the upholders of family values yet who do not value individual rights or personal autonomy, and who have little respect for the Constitutional principles that have allowed religion to thrive in this country unfettered by government coercion or corruption.

Speaking up, speaking out

Your friend just told a racist joke. What do you do?



You can try to ignore what this person is saying for the sake of harmony and this will probably be your instinct, because we do all like to please people – and confrontation is hard. We can't let friends get away with saying offensive things because that's the most insidious way those sentiments become normalized and sneak into our everyday vernacular. We have to be vigilant about our integrity, even if it's at the pub or a BBQ.

Someone just made a sexual innuendo about a mutual acquaintance. What do I say?

The same rules apply here. If someone you know has been openly sexist, call them out for it. Perhaps they thought it was allowed because they felt it was funny. As their colleague, you really need to make sure they know it's not OK. If it's presented as a punch line, just point out that you don't find it amusing. Don't give them your laughter and if you can, explain why you're not laughing. A powerful eye roll is a nice start, but saying out loud that you do not appreciate this kind of language is better.

Lashon hara, “לשון הרע; evil tongue, is the [halakhic](#) term for derogatory speech about a person, which emotionally or financially damages them or lowers them in the estimation of others. *Lashon hara* is considered to be a very serious [sin](#) in the [Jewish tradition](#). The communicator of lashon hara violates the prohibition of *lo telech rachil b'ameicha* ("do not go out as a [talebearer](#) among thy people").

Writing to Elected Officials

You have a powerful tool at your disposal to effect change around issues you care about.

Why Bother with Elected Officials?

Politicians Want To Be Re-Elected. A recent analysis of members of Congress found that most of their day is spent on election activities like fundraising, attending district events, conducting press outreach, and meeting with their voters. Members of Congress focus on raising money because 90% of the time, the candidate who raises the most money wins the election. ***The member's office only cares about people inside their district or state because they are the only ones who can vote for (or against) them.***



Where do I start?

What do I write about, who do I address it to, where do I send it, when is the best time to send it, why does everyone keep telling me to do this and how the heck do I get started?



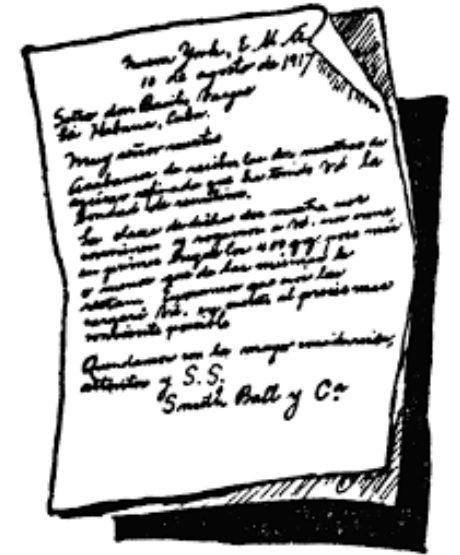
You can write them about anything. Your representatives are there to listen to your thoughts, concerns, questions and (hopefully, on occasion) praise.

You'll address it directly to a member of Congress (i.e., the House of Representatives) or the Senate — usually those who represent your district and state, but sometimes also members of certain committees that oversee the issue you're writing about. You can also write to your state, county and local elected officials. It is your right to do so, whether you voted for them or not.

How to Write an Advocacy Letter

Before You Write Your Advocacy Letter, Answer These Questions:

Your time is your most valuable resource, so it is important to ask yourself if writing an advocacy letter will be a useful activity or a giant waste of time. There are many factors to consider before deciding if you should write a letter to your elected official(s).



1. Has your legislator already taken a public stand on the issue you want to write about?

If so, it is very unlikely that they will change their mind on an issue. Constantly changing positions is bad for politicians because they will be labeled a "flip-flopper" by their political opponents.

2. Is the timing right?

Is there an upcoming vote on the issue you want to write about? Has the leadership of either party indicated they want to prioritize your issue during the current legislative session? Is the issue you are writing about newsworthy? If your issue is not relevant or your timing is off, your letter will most likely be ignored.



3. Will your letter elevate the issue?

Maybe your issue is not newsworthy or on politician's radar, but that does not necessarily mean you should not write your letter. If you have a cause that you think needs to be elevated, and your letter could accomplish that, then it might be worth your time to write. This is especially true if your issue is a win-win or could make your legislator look good by addressing the issue.

4. Do you have an ask for your legislator?



Writing a letter without including an ask is a waste of time. Make sure there is a relevant action your elected official, or the staff, can take to advance your issue. Ask the legislator to co-sign a current piece of legislation, ask if he or she can make a speech about your issue, ask him or her to attend an upcoming hearing on the issue or to try to speak with a member of the committee that oversees your issue. Ask them to support your issue, or vote in a certain way on a bill.

5. Are you willing to follow up with the staffer?

Just writing a letter and hoping it alone will somehow magically lead to a policy change or a law being signed is unrealistic. Your advocacy letter to Congress should be the beginning of a relationship you are trying to build with your member of Congress and their staff.

6. Include Your Personal Advocacy Story

When drafting your advocacy letter, it is important that you articulate why the issue is important to you.

You might be inclined to write a well-thought-out argument and include many statistics to back it up. However, if you really want to get your letter to resonate, you need to have a [personal and relatable story](#) — something that puts a human face on the issue.

Ask yourself why this issue matters to you, and craft your story into a powerful anecdote you can share with staffers.



How to Write an Advocacy Letter – TIPS

- **Use your own words, do not use a pre-written message.**
Include a return address so the staffer knows you are from the member's district or state. They may also want to mail you a response.
- **Use Proper Salutation.** The salutation should be "Dear Representative Smith" or "Dear Senator Smith" or "Dear Assemblyman Smith" depending on the office held.
- **After the greeting, be clear and concise about what your issue is and what position you want your lawmaker to take.** "I am writing you about..." or "This letter is in reference to..."
- **Include a personal RELEVANT story.**
- **Be sure to back up your stance with statistics and facts.** Add some data to your personal story to strengthen your argument.

- **Try to show how the issue affects other constituents in your congressional district.** Show your member of Congress the impact a change will have on you and your community.
- **Be courteous and respectful.**
- **If you are writing as part of a campaign from an advocacy organization, try to personalize it as much as you can.**



- **Avoid Righteous Indignation.** A polite and informative tone is best. Begin the letter with a short paragraph that describes the issue and the request you are making. An example of a standard opening sentence is: "I am writing about SB 1234, the Animal Welfare Rights Act, currently before the legislature. I encourage you to oppose this legislation as written on the grounds that"
- **Focus on Key Points.** Don't make the communication too wordy. A one-page letter is ideal, but two pages are acceptable. Avoid discussing tangential issues that will dilute or confuse your message.
- **In Closing.** Avoid threatening language. Simply recap the main points and encourage specific action. Don't be vague. Requests should be clear, concise and as specific as possible, such as to co-sponsor a bill.

Contacting Your Elected Officials

Names and address are online here: [U.S. Senators](#) and [Representatives in Congress](#).

Senate: 2 for all of Wisconsin

- Senator Tammy Baldwin (D)
- Senator Ron Johnson (R)

House of Representatives: Know what Congressional District (CD) you live in. Wisconsin has 8 CDs. SE Wisconsin generally encompasses **CD-1, currently held by Brian Steil**, and **CD-5, where the incumbent is James Sensenbrenner**.

Wisconsin State Legislature: <https://legis.wisconsin.gov/>

- State Senate
- State Assembly (Assemblyman/woman)





Using ResistBot – the **EASIEST WAY TO CONTACT YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS!**

Resistbot is a service that people in the United States can use to compose and send letters to elected officials from the messaging apps on their mobile phones, with the goal being that the task can be completed in "under two minutes". It identifies a user's state and federal elected officials, then provides an electronic service to deliver to those officials, as well as to local newspapers, and [to publish online](#). As the platform has developed, Resistbot has added functionality such as confirming voter registrations, locating town halls, finding volunteer opportunities, and locating polling places. Resistbot has been funded by small-dollar donations, over 24,000 as of September 12, 2017, and is built and maintained by volunteers.

Contact your representatives in under 2 minutes

Text the word **RESIST** to 50409 on [iMessage](#), [Messenger](#), [Twitter](#), [Telegram](#), or to [50409 on SMS](#)* and read what I text you back. I'll turn your texts into an letter, and deliver it to the elected officials you choose: from your state legislator to the President.

<https://resist.bot/>

ResistBot Commands

CONGRESS	Write or call your two Senators and Representative in the Congress
STATE	Write to your Governor and/or state legislators
SENATE	Write or call one or both of your U.S. Senators
HOUSE	Write or call your representative in the U.S. House
GOV	Write or call your Governor
LEGISLATURE	Write or call all your state legislators
DNC	Write to the Democratic National Committee
EDITOR	Submit your last letter as a letter to the editor to your local paper
SHARE	Make your last letter an open letter
PETITION	Make your last letter a signable petition
NEARBY	See open letters from your district
IMAGE	Download an image of your last letter
OFFICIALS	Print all your current officials and their phone numbers

Letters to the Editor

Waukesha Freeman: letters@conley.net

Milwaukee Journal/Sentinel: <https://static.jsonline.com/letter-to-the-editor/>

Wisconsin State Journal: https://madison.com/forms/online_services/letter/

Madison Capitol Times: https://madison.com/contact-capital-times-staff/article_ae12cde8-8474-11de-a04c-001cc4c03286.html

Other Wisconsin Newspapers: <https://www.nationalpopularvote.com/writing-letter-editor-wisconsin>



Reach Out as a Volunteer



Volunteer your skills to a political or nonprofit organization.

Your local organizations often need volunteers for grunt work, like cleaning, gardening or ushering recipients through their services. They may need help with creative tasks, too!

If you are politically bent, there is always a need for people to make phone calls, knock on doors, text messages, deliver signs or posters, address envelopes, write post cards, and so on.

Homeless shelters need help in various ways. Hebron House in Waukesha runs 4 homeless shelters.

Note your skills and experience when you sign up as a volunteer, or just email or call to offer your expertise where they could use it.

Gather with people and groups whose cause you support

The First Amendment to the United States **Constitution** states "Congress shall make no **law** respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the **right** of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress .

There are many examples of good protests that have proven their point without violence. Martin Luther King Jr. was one of the most influential people in the Equal Rights movement. This movement was not easy, but an essential fight for civil rights.

Some of us protested the war in Viet Nam in the late 60s. We have seen hundreds of thousands of people protesting police brutality after the death of George Floyd





Donate to Charities that Effect Change

- NAACP Legal Defense Fund <https://www.charitywatch.org/charities/naacp-legal-defense-and-educational-fund>
- ACLU Foundation <https://www.charitywatch.org/charities/american-civil-liberties-union-aclu-foundation>
- National Urban League <https://www.charitywatch.org/charities/national-urban-league-national-office>
- COVID charities <https://www.gofundme.com/c/blog/best-charities-to-donate-to>
- Political parties
- Legal aid: The Innocence Project <https://www.innocenceproject.org/>
- Resistbot
- Foundation for AIDS Research <https://www.charitywatch.org/charities/foundation-for-aids-research-amfar>
- Native American Rights Fund <https://www.charitywatch.org/charities/native-american-rights-fund>

List of Charities by Category <https://www.charitywatch.org/top-rated-charities>

Suggested Readings

The Advocacy Guide – a free, downloadable book. https://3028cdfe-50a0-4c14-92d2-de8da18f3a94.filesusr.com/ugd/0247c2_f43a3862dfcf44a990bc8f83f801b74b.pdf

Tips for effective letter writing to state legislators and other officials, by Adrian Hochstadt, JD, CAE

Offensive friends: <https://metro.co.uk/2019/08/29/how-to-deal-with-a-friend-who-makes-offensive-comments-10637664/?ito=cbshare>

References

6 Steps to Speaking Up <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/publications/speak-up/six-steps-to-speak-up>

Letter writing <https://www.avma.org/advocacy/advocacy-tools/tips-effective-letter-writing-state-legislators-and-other-officials>

The Advocacy Guide – a free, downloadable book https://3028cdfe-50a0-4c14-92d2-de8da18f3a94.filesusr.com/ugd/0247c2_f43a3862dfcf44a990bc8f83f801b74b.pdf

How to contact your members of Congress -- <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative#:~:text=If%20you%20know%20who%20your,the%20U.S.%20House%20switchboard%20operator.>

How to write an advocacy letter -- https://www.lobbyists4good.org/advocacy-letter?gclid=CjwKCAjwi_b3BRAGEiwAemPNU8ZcZF7lkPop9NO0JTR85pE2R1NK5QUyNaPQ9j3i9v3Q1WA6_zJPMBoCY3IQAvD_BwE

Resistbot: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resistbot#:~:text=six%20months%201%2C000%2C000.-,How%20Resistbot%20works,that%20these%20are%20real%20users.>

THIS PRESENTATION WILL BE POSTED ON THE J&CE FACEBOOK PAGE AND THE CEEW WEBSITE.

Next Week's Topic:

What's Next After the Pandemic

Tuesday, July 14th

Moderated by Pati Brickman

Possible Future Topics:

Criminal Justice & Prison Reform (RAC guest speaker)

Social Action in Action: CEEW Social Action Committee

Bridging a Divide - How to talk with people who don't agree with you.

White Privilege – What is it and why does it matter?

Open Forum – Air your own concerns about current events.

Gerrymandering – The importance of “fair maps” and how to achieve them

Managing Our Stress in a Global Pandemic and a Changing World