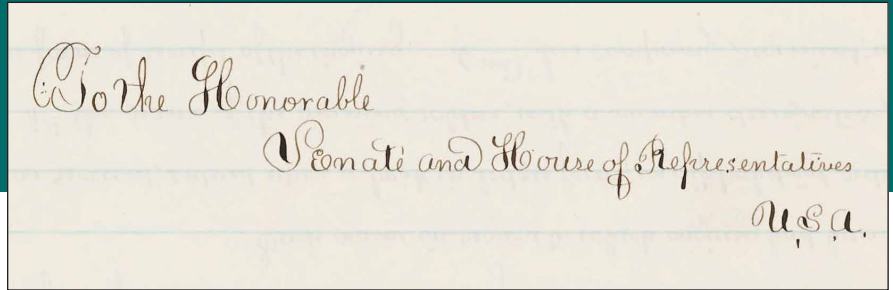


# About Letters to Congress

## VOCABULARY WORDS

- **Senate:** One of the two chambers of the U.S. Congress. The Senate has 100 voting members that each serve six-year terms.
- **House of Representatives:** One of the two chambers of the U.S. Congress. The House has 435 voting members, as well as six non-voting delegates and commissioners, that each serve two-year terms.



Beginning of a letter to Congress from Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross. The text says, "To the Honorable **Senate** and **House of Representatives**, U.S.A." National Archives and Records Administration

## How do people communicate with Congress?

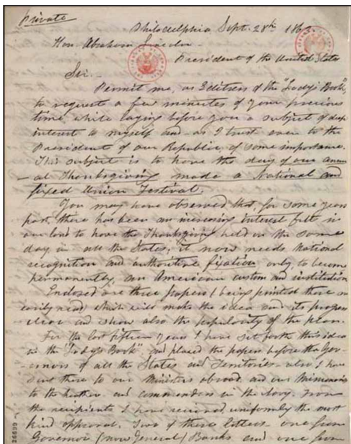
There are many ways to get in touch with members of Congress. For example, calling their offices, attending a town hall meeting, or sending a letter. Members of Congress want to hear from you. Letters, emails, and social media help Congress understand which issues are important to the people they serve.



Senate Mail Clerk Peter Runfola Sorts Mail. Photograph by the Associated Press, 1939, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress

## When did people start writing to Congress?

People sent letters to Congress as soon as the country began. As technology changed over time, other ways of contacting members also became popular, like the telephone and email. However, Congress still receives thousands of handwritten letters each year.



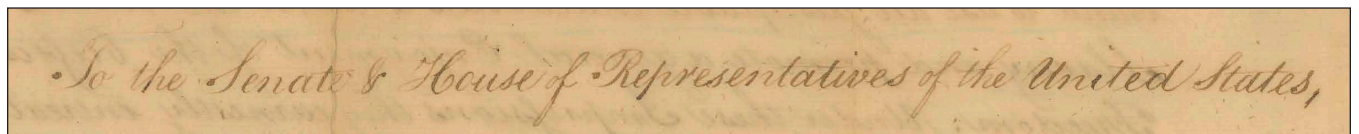
Sarah Hale's letter to Abraham Lincoln, asking him to make Thanksgiving a national holiday, 1863.

## Why do people write to Congress?

People write to Congress to share their opinions on issues that are important to them. Members of Congress consider those opinions as they make decisions about bills and laws. Sarah Hale, an American writer, wrote to members of Congress and Presidents for 30 years asking them to make Thanksgiving a national holiday.

## Who can write to Congress?

Anyone can write a letter to a member of Congress! You do not have to be an adult or a U.S. citizen to express your views to members of Congress. Even the founders wrote to Congress! Benjamin Franklin wrote to Congress in 1790, asking them to abolish slavery.



Beginning of a letter from Benjamin Franklin to Congress in 1790. The text says, "To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States."

# Write a Letter

1. Do you know who represents you in Congress? Find out through these links:
  - House of Representatives: [www.house.gov/representatives](http://www.house.gov/representatives)
  - Senate: [www.senate.gov/senators/senators-contact.htm](http://www.senate.gov/senators/senators-contact.htm)
2. Start your letter by addressing the member by their title and last name (example - “Dear Representative Smith or Dear Senator Smith”).
3. Introduce yourself by including your name and where you are from.
4. Think of a topic you want to write your about to your member of Congress.
  - a. What is important to you?
  - b. Why is it important to you?
5. Make sure your letter is clear and easy to understand.
6. Add a conclusion.
7. Clearly write the full name and address of the member on the front of an envelope. You can find their mailing address(es) through the links above.
8. Clearly write the return address (your address) in the upper left corner of the envelope so that your member may respond to you.
9. Fold your letter and seal it in an envelope.
10. Place the stamp in the upper right-hand corner of the envelope. Then, mail your letter!

## YOU WILL NEED:

- Paper
- Pen or pencil
- Envelope
- Stamp

