



## *Calling Your Elected Officials* *~A Guide for the Hesitant~*

### **Ban Military-Style Assault Weapons & High-Capacity Magazines**

#### **You've never called an elected official? You're not alone.**

The vast majority of Americans have never contacted their elected officials about anything. It's interesting. Americans are comfortable leaving comments on social media, calling in to talk radio shows, signing petitions, and even writing letters to the editor of their local paper, but they rarely pick up the phone and call their own representatives. That's why these calls have such an impact. It's not because callers are especially articulate, knowledgeable, or important; it's because the offices fielding the calls know that every caller represents a huge number of like-minded constituents who were personally reluctant to make direct contact.

#### **Common Hesitations...**

The biggie: "I don't know enough." Don't let this trip you up. The fact is, you are not calling to propose nuanced legislative policy or to offer technical language or to fake expertise. You are simply calling to communicate a concern or hope in plain language. The person who answers the phone will not quiz or challenge you. They will listen and then they will thank you.

People also hesitate to call for unconscious reasons. We associate elected officials with podiums in front of television cameras, practiced rhetoric, and skill at fielding hostile "gotcha" questions. We associate elected officials—particularly members of Congress—with the grand architecture of the Capitol and the power of Capitol police. Those unconscious associations make the prospect of calling an elected official somehow intimidating. The truth is, none of these associations remotely applies to the phone call.

## What to expect

Calling your elected official is a lot like making a restaurant reservation. The young staff member who answers the phone will be friendly, receptive, and will ask you nothing beyond perhaps your name and address, which you can share if you wish. They may also ask if you'd like to get an email response from the office regarding the topic of your call. The staffer's job is to tally the input they receive on a given issue and to treat constituents with warmth. Here's an example:

**Staffer:** "Hello! Senator Smith's office."

**You:** "Hi, I'm a constituent and a physician from Plainsville and I'm calling to urge Senator Smith to **support a nation-wide ban on military-style assault weapons and high-capacity magazines – weapons of war have no place in civilian hands.**

Gun violence has become a public health epidemic in our country. Public health-based solutions reduced motor vehicle death and injury rates – **it's time to implement a public health approach to reduce gun violence death and injury rates.**"

**Staffer:** "Thanks for reaching out. I'll share your input with the Senator. Would you like to receive follow-up regarding this issue?"

**You:** "Sure."

**Staffer:** "Will do. Can I get your name and address?"

**You:** Jane Williams, 25 Willow Avenue, Plainsville

**Staffer:** "Thanks. And would you like us to add you to our email list?"

**You:** Not today.

**Staffer:** Okay, all set. Is there anything else I can help you with today?"

**You:** "Nope. That's it. Thanks."

**Staffer:** "Thanks for calling."

**And that's it! Remember: constituent concerns are tallied and calls as simple as this do make a difference.**