

# Nonprofit Advocacy Coalition

Alliance for Justice      Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest

National Council of Nonprofit Associations      OMB Watch

June 20, 2006

Dear Member of Congress:

The Nonprofit Advocacy Coalition strongly urges you to avoid adopting any optional barriers to the Write Your Representative service that will block constituent communications. The recently announced "Logic Puzzle" and its ilk are unfortunately hindering constituent contact with some offices, and we are concerned that these types of additional hurdles for your email services will prevent your constituents from participating in the representative decision-making process.

Ensuring that the author of an email to you is indeed a constituent is reasonable – forcing that person to take a test, however simple, just to send you a message is not. By the time a constituent reaches your web form, he or she has formed an opinion about an issue, navigated the Internet to find your website, completed a web form to verify their residence in your district, and constructed a message to send you. There is no compelling need for an additional obstacle between a constituent and an elected representative.

Many of the ways constituents communicate with their Member of Congress can be costly or time-consuming. Handwritten letters are held up for weeks by inspection and processing. Phone calls require either long-distance charges or the location of a toll-free number, and must be timed within normal work hours. Faxes are costly and require appropriate equipment.

By comparison, electronic communications are much more convenient for constituents. Emails and web forms are low-cost, can be sent at any time, and are instantly received. The technology allows for greater civic participation and better constituent contacts.

We understand that Congressional offices receive spam emails, just as anyone with an email address receives spam. However, not all mass emails are spam – in most cases, the mass or automated emails you receive *are* true constituent contacts that deserve to be received and read. Mass emails from legitimate constituents should never be considered “unwanted” or “false sentiment.” Constituents utilizing pre-written letters are still constituents communicating their views to elected officials. As our country becomes ever more electronic, busy, and distracted, Members of Congress should find ways to encourage constituents to become more engaged citizens – not to make it harder to reach out to elected officials.

Please do not opt to use the “Logic Puzzle,” nor any other email or web form obstacles, in your constituent email services. Doing so will only hinder your constituent communications at a time when more Americans than ever becoming actively involved in their democracy.

Please feel free to contact Shannon Garrett at Alliance for Justice (202-822-6070; [sgarrett@afj.org](mailto:sgarrett@afj.org)) or Jennifer Lowe-Davis at OMB Watch (202-234-8494; [jlowe@ombwatch.org](mailto:jlowe@ombwatch.org)) if you have any questions about this technology.

Sincerely,

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