OKLAHOMANS FOR EXCELLENCE IN SCIENCE EDUCATION

PROCEDURES TO INFLUENCE LEGISLATION

[Persons named herein are for 2013/2014 and should be replaced in future years. The President of OESE, with assistance of the Secretary and other members, is charged with oversight of the described actions and appointment of additional or subsequent duties and for revisions of these procedures each year]

MESSAGES TO LEGISLATORS:

Our experience has shown this, to be perhaps the most important activity in opposing bills and gets the most persons involved. Over time the most effective ways to send messages have changed. In order, the most likely messages to be noticed or at least tallied are, in order of effectiveness:

(1) Written or typed letters sent by snail mail or hand delivered (especially if doing in-person lobbying at the Capitol). Time required and postage costs are the major negatives, BUT they do get most attention.

(2) Phone calls are easy and more often tallied than emails. This does require calls to each member of a committee, etc.

(3) Emails. For a while these were often read and tallied, but with increased use and ease of submission, they are now not as effective. This is now the poorest choice of the three. Use as last choice, but send if this is best one can do.

If the bill subject is very controversial and receives lots of media attention, more messages will be sent to legislators. Many bills actually receive very few messages, often none.

They often may not read emails and letters at all, BUT their legislative assistants usually tally them and numbers do count – often getting legislators attention.

On items of interest to OESE – statewide issues- messages should be sent to all members of appropriate committees (usually House Common Education Committee and Senate Education Committee). You do not have to be a constituent to send messages, but ALWAYS mention it if you are. You are probably commenting because the proposed legislation is important to the entire State, MESSAGES CAN BE SHORT AND TO THE POINT; long messages reduce the chance that they will be read. As proposed legislation moves through various committees and legislative bodies, letters should be sent at each level. This may seem like overkill, but new legislators bill be involved at each step. Getting persons to send messages several times on a
single bill may seem burdensome, but is necessary. Numbers do count. Legislators appreciate ‘thank you’ messages when they vote the ‘right’ way.

It often is best not to mention other organizations in your message. Groups that are clearly not political and centered mostly on science and education (AAAS, AIBS, OAS, OSTA, NBTA, etc.,) may be mentioned in your message, if appropriate. But organizations that are usually conceived to be mostly political and liberal (e.g., ACLU, AU) may result in a negative response by conservative legislators, especially in Oklahoma; these organizations understand the reasons for this.

When appropriate, the harm that may be done by creationist bills to the state economy should be a primary point to make. For example, the many medical research and med-tech industries and state colleges would have problems in recruiting scientists. Such bills may also harm recruitment of new science-based businesses.

Addresses of Legislators: The contact details of members of the leadership in the Senate and House and the Education Committee of the Senate and Common Education Committee of the House will be sent out each year as soon as they are posted and will be shown on the OESE web site ((by Dan Hough) and on the Oklahoma Evolution/Climate Change List Serve (by V. Hutchison); the list serve is NOT an OESE activity.

Analyses of Proposed Bills: As soon as possible after a bill of interest is filed an analysis of the bill will be prepared, usually not to exceed one page. These analyses will contain a brief description of the bill and reasons it should be defeated (or in some cases, perhaps, supported). Preparation for 201213/2014 Rich Broughton.

Legislative Committee (David Grow, Dan Hough, V. Hutchison [temporary]. Duties are to examine the Legislative web site (http://www.oklegislature.gov) as bills are filed and notify the persons (below) charged with responses to state, national and social groups for action. The bills should be copied and attached to the messages. The web master will post news items about the bills on the OESE web site. Since many shell bills (bill numbers and names without content) are usually filed so legislators can amend them along the way and any bills can be amended to add items of interest to OESE, this committee needs to keep checking on the bills throughout the session through use of the Legislative web sites.

Current bill tracking instructions are available under the Articles and Flyers section of the OESE web site (http://www.oklascience.org).

As soon as a bill of interest is assigned to a committee the persons below should be notified with the details. Sample letters, etc.; have been given to those responsible.

Messages to the OESE membership about bills of interest should be sent from the OESE Google account email, <oklascience@gmail.com>, (if help is needed contact the OESE Secretary).

Information about bills of interest should be uploaded to the OESE Google account in the documents section (or sent to the Secretary for filing).
REQUESTS TO ORGANIZATIONS TO OPPOSE BILLS

A list of these groups with contact information is available in the OESE archives maintained by the Secretary, but each year the contact information should be reviewed since officers and staffs of the listed organizations often change. The President of OESE is responsible for appointing a member to review the information. Suggestions for additions should be sought from Board members.

State Organizations: **(Deborah Hill)** Should include request for messages to OESE members also.

National Organizations **(Jody Maness)**

Social Media Groups **(David Wrenn)**

Letters should contain brief information about the bill along with the request for the organizations to send messages in opposition to the members of the committee to which a bill is assigned and, if appropriate, ask the organization to request their members to send messages as well. **EACH ORGANIZATION SHOULD BE SENT AN INDIVIDUAL LETTER WITH THE ORGANIZATION MENTIONED IN THE BODY OF THEIR LETTER.**

The organization should be asked to send a copy of any messages they may send to legislative bodies as a result of an OESE request. ALSO, ask if the organization will request their members in the State to send individual messages as well – this will act to multiply responses. Some groups already do this, but are better to ask each time.

As a bill is approved and moved to other committees (e.g., House to Senate), the request to groups should be repeated, along with thanks for the earlier messages. So far, all state and national groups have been very responsive to the requests. For example, in 2012 the groups sent message to ALL members of the Senate to kill an amendment – it worked. The Senate leadership did not allow the bad amendment to be heard.

Each time a group responds they should receive a message of thanks. If a bill dies, it would be appropriate also to send a message stating the fact and that their help was a factor.

**Facebook:** All members should post notices of bills on Facebook with a brief description of the bill and why it is bad and list the email addresses of legislators to receive the message (e.g., education committee). **If every OESE member does this, we can generate many more messages.** Also consider other social media. Other social media can also be useful.

As soon as a bill of interest proceeds through the process it may be assigned to other committees (in the other house) or modified in some way that would require a new letter.

At some point it may be necessary to send messages to the entire membership of the Senate (as happened in 21012 with success) or to the leadership of either house.

**MANY individuals were also asked to send messages and these really helped. Asking friends, colleagues, and family members to send a brief message can add greatly to the cause. For**
example, in 2012 more than 220 individual messages went to the entire Senate – this was a huge number for such messages and was a big help in the last ditch effort that worked.

People can (and should) send messages to legislators that are not their representative. However, when a person is a constituent of a legislator that should definitely be mentioned early in the message.

**NUMBERS DO COUNT.** We have shown over the years that number of messages does have major influence. Legislators may not read the messages (some do), but their assistants always keep a tally of the numbers. Most bills receive no messages on a bill and others only a few. I know of examples where only three to five messages in opposition on bills caused legislators to change their vote.

**DIRECT IN-PERSON LOBBYING EFFORTS**

It may be very helpful to visit appropriate legislators at the Capitol to state opposition. If one has a legislator known to be supportive of our cause, they may be asked to see if OESE reps can speak in opposition before the committee hearings. Committee chairs have the discretion to allow or not allow persons to speak. Some let people sign up just before the committee meeting, others may require approval at least a day before the session. If you know a committee member or are a constituent, ask them to see if you can speak. If allowed to address a committee, one is likely to be severely limited to as few as two minutes! So be prepared. This must be handled carefully by those who have some experience in direct lobbying. Of course, be polite and respectful to legislators and their staffs, even when you may be denied access = even sometimes rudely. Of course, thank them for their time, etc.

When visiting a legislator’s office, a one-page sheet on colored paper should be left for the legislator (or handed to them, if they are present). “Oklomans for Excellence in Science Education ([http://www.oklascience.org](http://www.oklascience.org))” should appear at the bottom of the sheet. Legislators receive thousands of paper copies of bills all on white paper. Colored paper attracts attention and legislators have told us that they are more likely to look at an item on colored paper. **CAUTION:** It should be made clear that you represent OESE and yourself, NOT your school or other organization. Similarly, depending upon your email address, if connected to a school or organization that might object to your use of the address, one should use another email (e.g., gmail.com). Most will likely have no problem with this.

The Oklahoma legislature usually meets from the first week in February to mid-May. Legislators are not usually at the Capitol on Fridays, thus visits should not be planned on Fridays.

Lobbying in groups can be helpful. By splitting up more legislators can be visited at one time. Also, a small group (2 to 4) visiting an office may make a better impression.

**LETTERS TO EDITORS:**
Members of OESE, especially Board members, should write letters to editors of newspapers in Oklahoma. Such letters have to meet the limit imposed by the paper, but these in papers throughout the State have been useful. Similarly, comments on published letters on the newspaper web site can also be useful. Smaller papers in rural areas often seek such input. Check the newspaper guidelines for letters: maximum words allowed, frequency letters are accepted (e.g., The Oklahoman allows one per month). Smaller papers often encourage letters. Write succinctly and to the point.

Consider letters and Op/Eds to publications other than daily newspapers, for example in Oklahoma the Oklahoma Observer, The Gazette. Similar weekly, bi-monthly publications in Tulsa, etc., are Include the OESE web site URL when appropriate.

**OP/EDS:**

Longer opinion pieces are often sought by newspapers and can be longer than letters to editors. A well-argued Op/Ed can help influence local legislators and help educate the public. OESE has done fairly well with these in past years, but much more can be done. Weekly publications such as The Oklahoma Gazette, Urban Tulsa, and The Oklahoma Observer are widely read and have been good places that have published articles and op/eds. But major papers in larger cities have a big impact and we have had items published therein.

Depending upon your email address, if connected to a school or organization that might object to your use of the address, one should use another email (e.g., gmail.com). Most will likely have no problem with this, but some schools and other organizations will.

**TALKS TO CITIZEN GROUPS.**

Volunteering to speak to citizen groups (county political groups [Democrats], mainstream groups, civic clubs, colleges, etc., have also been useful in the past. Such presentations can be about evolution and/or climate change, but the audience can be asked to send messages to legislators (handouts with addresses will help). Also sheets should be passed around for folks to sign up for the Oklahoma Evolution/Climate Change List Serve (forms are on OESE web site or available from the Secretary). It has been such sign-ups over the years that have kept the number of subscribers increased. The list serve, reaching over 900 subscribers has been a MAJOR source of letters to legislators and should be maintained. Also brochures with applications for OESE membership should be handed out.

The OESE web site has a Speakers Bureau listing members available for presentations with a list of subjects. OESE should increase the number of persons willing to serve as speakers and broaden the list of subjects covered. OESE members, especially Board members should consider joining the Bureau.
WEB SITE.

Our web master has been excellent in posting the news on legislation and providing information on how folks can send messages to the Legislator. As of now, however, the web site probably accounts for few responses, compared to the other methods. A mention of our web site address where appropriate will help increase readership.

PARTICIPATION AT ORGANIZATION MEETINGS

Although direct lobbying for or against legislation is not usually permitted at meetings of many organizations, the use of an exhibitors table should be scheduled for meetings such as the Oklahoma Academy of Science, Oklahoma Science Teachers Association, various workshops, etc. This activity can increase the number of supporters/activists. OESE has a brochure describing the organization and handouts on a variety of subjects available. When and where appropriate a handout(s) on analyses of pending legislation can be very helpful. Sign-up sheets for the List Serve should also be available.