
The following guide to effective citizen lobbying of Congress focuses on H.R. 691, the Spectrum Protection Act of 2005. However, the advice is equally valid for other legislation of interest to hams, and any other bill before Congress that you would like your representatives to co-sponsor or support.

Effective Lobbying In Support of Amateur Radio — Step by Step

BY TOM COATES,* N3IJ, AND JOSEPH T. KRYSZTOFORSKI,† AJ3X

The Spectrum Protection Act is important. Amateur radio has no exclusive allocations above 222 MHz, and we're unable to participate in spectrum auctions. We need some legal standing, just as users of the national parks have.

There's no reason why the Spectrum Protection Act of 2005, H.R. 691, shouldn't have at least 250 House co-sponsors, plus 60 or more in the Senate, even though the best it has done in previous years is 167 representatives and 11 senators. Co-sponsorships by majorities of the House and Senate make it simpler for the sponsor to schedule committee hearings and floor votes. None of us has to work very hard to gain co-sponsors, but amateurs in every Congressional district need to do their part. This article will explain what to do. It's not difficult, but just writing letters is not enough.

In April 2003 *QST* published an article by Derek Riker, KB3JLF, entitled "Communicating with Congress." We found Derek's article to resemble a chapter in the front of the *ARRL Handbook*—a clear discussion of the basic theory. What is also needed is a construction article, such as those in *CQ*. We couldn't find such an article anywhere, so we wrote one based on the experience we gained in convincing four of our state's representatives to co-sponsor the Spectrum Protection Act in the first six weeks after it was introduced. By late May we had approached seven of our state's representatives. All became co-sponsors.

Although our example is the Spectrum Protection Act, the process should apply to House Resolution 230 (urging the FCC to reconsider its decision on Broadband over Power Lines), H.R. 3876 (which would hold homeowner associations to the same "reasonable accommodation" standard for amateur antennas that currently applies to local and state governments), and other legislation. This is not the only way to lobby, but it worked in every case in which we used it. Still, we don't have the last word. Suggestions are welcome!

The process has two parts: the approach and the follow-up. We'll describe both, and we will also explain why you may get results more easily than we did. Follow-up is essential.

Start your approach by finding out who your representative is. Go to "Contacting the Congress" at <www.vsi.com/juan/congress> and enter your street address (*There is*

[date]

[Your Name
Street Address
City, State ZIP]

Congressman Joe James
1699 Ham Street
Yourtown, AA 98765

Dear Congressman James:

As a federally licensed Amateur Radio operator I am writing to thank you for your support of HR 713, The Amateur Radio Spectrum Protection Act of 2003.

The bill has been re-introduced with no changes, as HR 691, the Amateur Radio Spectrum Protection Act of 2005.

This bill will help ensure the future of the U.S. Amateur Radio Service by preventing further erosion of the radio spectrum we depend on for emergency communication, people-to-people diplomacy and training young people in science and technology.

Your leadership will be essential in securing passage of this much-needed legislation. I would appreciate your support for HR 691.

Sincerely,

[Your signature and callsign]
Telephone number

Fig. 1— A letter to a representative, thanking him or her for supporting the bill in the previous session and asking for support this time. Send this letter after you call the local legislative specialist.

a similar link on the *CQ* homepage, <www.cq-amateur-radio.com>—ed.). Bookmark or print the pages with the details on your representative. Note the name and phone number of the legislative director. To learn more about your representative's background and interests, go to <www.house.gov>. From there you can find the representative's personal website and examine his or her biography.

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Rep. Michael Bilirakis (R-FL) is seen here at night speaking at an emergency-preparedness conference he hosted with Florida Governor Jeb Bush and other Tampa-area congressmen, is the prime sponsor of H.R. 691, the Amateur Radio Spectrum Protection Act of 2005.

If your representative co-sponsored the bill in previous sessions, ask him or her now to support it again. To find out whether your representative was a past co-sponsor, go to <http://thomas.loc.gov> and select "Search Bills & Resolutions." On the search page select the "Summary and Status" radio button, select "Word or Phrase," enter "spectrum protection" into the text box, and select the congressional session to search. Remember to search the current session and three previous sessions. On the page for the bill select "Co-sponsors."

If your representative is already a co-sponsor, call the Washington office and leave a message to say "thank you," or edit the sample letter in fig. 1, thanking him or her for supporting H.R. 691.

If your representative co-sponsored the bill in the 108th, 107th, or 106th Congresses—but not the 109th—follow these two steps.

1. Approach your representative with a call to the legislative director in Washington and identify yourself as a constituent and "a licensed member of the U.S. Amateur Radio Service." Tell the staff member that you appreciate the congressman's (or congresswoman's) support for the Spectrum Protection Act in the previous sessions, and request that they support it again. Write down the staff member's name and the date of the call.

2. After you call, send a letter such as the one in fig. 1. It worked well for us.

We found that our representatives who were previous co-sponsors were pleased to be reminded. One registered as a co-sponsor on the day Joe called, another on the day we visited. Others took several weeks, even with weekly reminders. Allow a week and if the representative doesn't appear in the listing on thomas.loc.gov, start the follow-up phase: Call the Washington office, ask for the person you spoke with previously, and ask if the representative needs any additional information. After that, call weekly. This is the easiest and most productive part of the follow-up process. In addition, you may be able to approach your representative at a public gathering, as described in Step 6 below. Previous co-spon-

[date]

[Your Name
Street Address
City, State ZIP]

Congressman Joe James
1699 Ham Street
Yourtown, AA 98765

Dear Congressman James:

As a federally licensed Amateur Radio operator, I am writing to urge you to co-sponsor H.R. 691, the Amateur Radio Spectrum Protection Act of 2005.

Amateur Radio is a volunteer service, prohibited by Federal law and international agreement from accepting compensation, so radio amateurs are not able to participate in the FCC's spectrum auctions. Our access to the frequency bands we depend on to conduct community-based emergency communications, international people-to-people diplomacy and technical training for young people is threatened. H.R. 691 will secure our access to the needed spectrum and enable us to continue our 80-year tradition of serving the nation.

Ms. [local legislative specialist] and Mr. [Washington legislative specialist] have received supporting information. I will be pleased to answer any additional questions.

Sincerely,

[Your signature and callsign]
Telephone number

Fig. 2— A letter to a representative who has not supported the bill recently, requesting support.

sors are valuable; our bill could quickly gain more than a hundred co-sponsors if all the supporters from the previous sessions sign on.

The Seven-Step Method

If your representative has not been a co-sponsor recently, follow the seven easy steps summarized below. Of all the things we tried, these worked the best, when executed in the order listed. The essential details of how to execute these seven steps follow the summary.

1. Call the local office and request an appointment with the senior staff member handling legislation. You may not get an appointment with the representative (they're in Washington most of the time), but it is reasonable to get 20 or 30 minutes with the staff member, and that's who you really need anyway. It may be useful to speak with the representative, but it is essential to thoroughly brief a legislative specialist on the representative's staff.

2. Prepare a letter to the representative. Use the sample in fig. 2 and modify it accordingly.

3. Prepare a package of supporting materials about amateur radio in general plus details on what amateurs in your area have done to provide emergency communications, people-to-people diplomacy, and training for young people in science and public service. A list of the items we included in our handout is in the sidebar. Clip the original signed letter to the front of the package and send it to the representative's Washington legislative director via the local office (Don't mail



Sen. Michael Crapo (R-ID) is the sponsor of the Senate version of the Amateur Radio Spectrum Protection Act, S-1236.

it to Washington; see explanation below). You could also drop it off while you're in the local office for your meeting. Carry a second copy to the meeting to leave with the local legislative specialist. Take additional copies for the amateurs on your team.

4. Meet with the local legislative specialist. After you introduce yourselves, you could explain the purpose of the meeting in words such as these:

We're some of the [number] amateur radio operators in the [name] area. For the past 80 years the Amateur Radio Service has been providing emergency communications, conducting international people-to-people diplomacy, and introducing young people to science and technology. Our ability to continue with these activities is threatened by commercial interests and spectrum auctions, because the U.S. Amateur Radio Service is all-volunteer. We are prohibited by international agreement from accepting compensation. We can't match dollars with commercial entities and participate in auctions. We depend on legislation and federal regulation of the service. H.R. 691 will protect the little pieces of the radio spectrum we use and allow us to continue our service to the nation.

Deliver the letter and discuss the contents of the package. Expect to patiently educate the legislative specialist from the ground up. It's not their fault if they aren't familiar with amateur radio! (One staff member said to us, "Amateur radio . . . do they still have that?") One method is to place the package before the legislative specialist and page through it, saying a few sentences about each

item. At the end, hand the package to the legislative specialist and ask if he/she has any questions. Before rising to leave, ask whether the staff member needs additional information in order to recommend co-sponsorship to the representative. Find out when they plan to discuss it with the representative, in general terms if they can't be specific.

5. Ask all the amateurs in the congressional district to call the Washington office and send e-mails asking the representative to support the bill, at the time the staff member said they would be discussing it with the representative.

6. If you get an appointment with the representative, show up on time with no more than two people in your group. Expect a very brief meeting. Thank the representative for being interested in the bill, mention that you have briefed the staff member (by name), ask if the representative has any questions, and close by saying, "We appreciate your support, Congressman (or Congresswoman)."

If you didn't get an appointment, check the representative's website on <www.house.gov>. See if the representative is scheduled to be at a public event any time soon. Designate one member of your group to approach the representative. That person should introduce himself/herself as representing the amateurs who live in the district and politely request the representative's support. As we said before, speaking with the representative is not essential. In a couple of cases, it did seem to speed things up. This concludes the approach.

7. Follow up by checking the <thomas.loc.gov> site daily for new co-sponsors. As soon as your representative is listed as a co-sponsor, send a thank-you letter to the local office. Ask other amateurs in the district to send e-mails. If, after two weeks, the representative is still not listed as a co-sponsor, call the legislative director in Washington as described above and inquire politely whether the representative needs additional information. We have never encountered a substantive objection to the Spectrum Protection Act, although we have encountered some busy, preoccupied staff members. Have a brief, polite conversation with the same staff member every week until the representative appears on the list of co-sponsors.

The paragraphs that follow provide additional detail on how to accomplish these seven steps.

Always treat staff members with respect. Some are interns, but some are staff directors with degrees in law or

political science. It's hard to tell by looking, and all staff members are influential. Tom has never spoken with his Congressman, an early co-sponsor, but the Congressman's legislative director returned Tom's calls and helped with this article. Once again, it is not necessary to speak directly with your representative in order to gain his/her co-sponsorship. In our experience, making a special trip for a brief cameo meeting is inefficient, but if you're invited, you must accept and show up.

For your meetings wear business clothing. Take a maximum of three people (we found two were enough). Decide in advance who on your team will pace the meeting and decide when to say good-bye. Avoid jargon. Say "international contact" instead of DX, "Morse code" instead of CW, and "amateur radio" not ham radio. Try to repress the normal ham impulses to be talkative and witty. Just be polite and business-like. Stay on topic. Do not discuss other issues, the upcoming election, your opinions of the representative's actions or views, etc. Encourage questions, and if you aren't sure of the answers, be honest: Take notes and let your counterpart know that you will get back to them with an answer. Be sure to respond to any questions within a day or two of the meeting.

Send or deliver one of the background packages to the local office, addressed to the legislative director by name in Washington. See the sidebar for suggestions about what to include in the background package. Don't mail it to Washington, because postal mail is delayed there for inspection and decontamination. Why send a copy to Washington after you to meet with the local staff director? It's the Washington legislative director or specialist who will be answering last-minute questions and who will actually authorize the registration that makes your Congressman or Congresswoman an official co-sponsor. Keep the Washington staff in the loop.

Attach names and addresses of amateurs in the district to a letter to the representative. Signatures may be better than typed names, but we know from our own experience they can be much more time-consuming to collect. We recall vividly a meeting with HR 691's first co-sponsor (Joe's Congressman). As he paged through a long list of the names and addresses of amateurs in his district, attached to a letter, he exclaimed with pleasure, "Those are my constituents!"

After the first meeting, ask constituents to contact the representative's

office. There are three ways to do this: telephone, e-mail, or postal mail.

Get the telephone number from the "Contacting the Congress" site previously mentioned. Dial the number of the Washington office and say, "I'm a constituent, my name is (name), I live at (address), and I want to ask the congressman (or congresswoman) to support H.R. 691, the Amateur Radio Spectrum Protection Act. It's very important to the future of amateur radio."

Send e-mail through <www.house.gov/writerep>. We are told that e-mail from non-constituents is redirected to the congressman or congresswoman who actually represents them, but it might go to the bit-bucket; we can't be certain. Either way, it is effort wasted. Direct all e-mail to your representative and your representative only. All you need to say in the e-mail is "Please support H.R. 691. It is very important to the future of the U.S. Amateur Radio Service."

Send letters or QSL cards to the local office. (Remember, postal mail to Washington is delayed for inspection.) Our legislative contacts have told us that QSLs with a note on them get favorable attention because of their uniqueness. Be sure that your street address is on the QSL card. Cards with P.O. boxes or addresses outside the district will be discarded. Put a label on the printed side with the message, "Please support H.R. 691."

No matter what method you use, originality is not as important as a large number of messages in a short time period, according to our sources. One traditionalist did tell us that she prefers letters "from the heart," so that's good, if you can do it. What's important is to send something for the staff to tally.

Before the event at which you plan to approach the representative (if that is part of your plan), log onto Thomas and check whether your representative has registered a co-sponsor. If so, prepare to thank him/her for the support. At the event—town meeting, community picnic, ribbon-cutting, or whatever—approach the representative and deliver your one-minute sound bite. Try to personalize it. One of the congressmen representing our county is a former schoolteacher. Tom concluded his brief remarks (above) about emergency communications, people-to-people diplomacy and getting young people into scientific careers by mentioning that students enjoy speaking with astronauts on the International Space Station from their classrooms. When Tom

What Does the Spectrum Protection Act Say?

The full text of H.R. 691 is available on <<http://thomas.loc.gov>>. This is the essence of it:

Section 303 of the Communications Act of 1934 is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

(z) Notwithstanding subsection (c), after July 1, 2005—

[The Commission shall]

- (1) make no reallocation of primary allocations of bands of frequencies of the amateur radio and amateur satellite services;
- (2) not diminish the secondary allocations of bands of frequencies to the amateur radio or amateur satellite service; and
- (3) make no additional allocations within such bands of frequencies that would substantially reduce the utility thereof to the amateur radio or amateur satellite service; unless the Commission, at the same time, provides equivalent replacement spectrum to amateur radio and amateur satellite service.

saw the immediate positive reaction, he said, "We sure would appreciate your assistance with this, congressman," handed him a copy of the letter, shook his hand, and quickly made way for the next person in line. Members of Congress are on tight schedules.

In all cases, be sure to check <thomas.loc.gov> the morning of the event where you expect to speak with the representative. Don't miss a chance to express appreciation. This is not the last time amateur radio will need the

support of Congress.

Why did it take so many reminders for some representatives to sign on when others did so in a day or two? Every case is different, but we came up with a plausible explanation. Visualize a meeting with your own boss, where you're seeking decisions on a number of matters. Some items on your agenda take longer than expected. As a result, the ones toward the bottom of the list don't get discussed before the meeting ends and they have to be postponed. Regular

What to Include in the Information Package for Congressional Staff

A title page: "H.R. 691, the Amateur Radio Spectrum Protection Act of 2005—REFERENCE MATERIAL," and names and contact information. A complete cover page and preface, ready to download and customize with your state's information, is available from <<http://n3ij.home.comcast.net/executivesummary.doc>>.

H.R. 691 itself: <<http://thomas.loc.gov>>. Enter H.R. 691. select "Bill no.," and when the result is displayed, select "GPO."

Public law 103-408, the definitive legislative statement of public support for amateur radio: <<http://thomas.loc.gov>>. Select "Public Laws," select P.L. 103-408, and select version 1, agreed to by both House and Senate.

Testimony by Jim Haynie, W5JBP, before the House Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet, June 11, 2003: <<http://energycommerce.house.gov/108/Hearings/06112003hearing951/Haynie1536.htm>>.

Testimony by Harold Kramer, WJ1B, before the House Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet, September 29, 2005: <<http://energycommerce.house.gov/108/Hearings/09292005hearing1648/Kramer2641.htm>>

Articles to illustrate how we provide emergency communications and international people-to-people diplomacy and how we introduce young people to science and technology. These were selected for impact:

"This Is NOT a Test," *QST*, Nov. 2001, p. 28

"The Shuttle Tragedy—Hams Play Major Role in Columbia Recovery Effort," *CQ*, Apr. 2003, p. 11

"From DXpedition to Disaster Aid," *CQ*, April 2005, p. 13

"Project Goodwill Albania," *QST*, June 2003, p. 44 (the sidebar) and "WØGJ, Winner of the ARRL 2004 International Humanitarian Award," *QST*, June 2005, p. 50

"Take Your Ham to Work Day," *CQ*, July 2005, p. 16

Recent letters from local officials expressing appreciation for emergency communications and public service.

Recent stories from local papers.

The larger the package, the more formal and polished the assembly needs to be, with covers, binding, etc. In addition, the larger it is, the less likely it is to be read.

How About the Senators?

The approach recommended for representatives also applies for senators, with these refinements:

Sen. Mike Crapo of Idaho has sponsored a companion bill, S 1236. Therefore, if your senator was previously a co-sponsor, handle the situation as previously described.

If your senator was not previously a co-sponsor, we recommend waiting until you have a majority of your state's representatives on board, to demonstrate statewide support. Then apply the same procedure described above for representatives.

Don't try to give the senators a list of all the amateurs in the state. It's too large. Just mention the number.

reminders to the aide keep our bill on the agenda. Informal approaches to the representative encourage her or him to give our bill more priority. The more persistent we amateurs are, the more influential we—and the Amateur Radio Service—become.

Why could this be easier for you than it was for us? Maryland congressmen don't have legislative specialists in their local offices, most of which are only a few hours away from the Capitol. We had to travel to Washington for all our meetings. You won't have to do that, which may make it easier.

Where's the ARRL in all this? ARRL leadership has done difficult, essential work getting the Spectrum Protection bills introduced and testifying in their

Can't We Keep Politics Out of Amateur Radio?

This article is not about influencing elections. Vote for whomever you wish. This is about influencing legislation, a right guaranteed by the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. The early history of Amateur Radio, *200 Meters and Down*, is filled with efforts by amateurs to influence legislation. If they hadn't been so active and successful, we wouldn't be on the air today. (Article 2 of the Amateur's Code should be amended to insert "... helps to get legislation passed favoring amateur radio ...") Still, some hams have problems with the idea. There's an urban legend going around saying that the IRS prohibits 501(c)(3)s—tax-exempt organizations, like some radio clubs—from lobbying. This is relevant if you were thinking of writing your representative on your club's stationery (elected officials are more likely to respond to groups of voters than individuals). The web page of the Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest has a letter from the IRS that should clear that up. See <[http:// www.clpi.org/irs_lobbying.pdf](http://www.clpi.org/irs_lobbying.pdf)>. The site has other interesting material, too. If you still have concerns, consult your attorney, or approach the representative as suggested in the article, leaving the club's name out of it.

There may also be philosophical objections. You may really dislike your representative or senator. Many of us do; that's what elections are for. We have met hams who apparently dislike their representative and senators (all of them) even more than they like amateur radio. Or, the idea of lobbying in support of amateur radio may be distasteful to you, as it is to some amateurs we have met. Or, you may believe the Spectrum Protection Act is bad public policy, as one amateur told us. If any of these describe you, you can still help strengthen the future of amateur radio. Teach a licensing class, find someone to "Elmer" or get involved in the "Big Project." Lobbying this issue is just not for you.

defense. In addition, they were instrumental during previous sessions in lining up dozens of co-sponsors. As mentioned above, these past co-sponsors are waiting for a phone call asking them to support our bill again.

It will take all of us to get these bills passed. You may not approve of the ARRL; some hams don't. Or, you may not approve of your senators or representative; that's why we have elections.

Please put any disapproval aside for now and help get your representatives and senators signed up as co-sponsors. The legislation will benefit us all, members or not. And it's rewarding to see how much can be accomplished simply by not waiting for someone else to make the first move! You will have done your part to ensure the future of the U.S. Amateur Radio Service. Plus, you'll have some new skills.

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