

## **SPEAK OUT!**

### *Letter to the Editor*

As lawmakers struggle to address the nation's economic and budgetary concerns, highlighting the benefits of investing in scientific research has become more important than ever. Results of the current debate have the potential to be devastating, not just for the scientific community, but for the public we serve.

The news is full of stories on the debate over the nation's debt and proposed spending cuts, the impacts of each new proposal, and the consequences of Congresses' inability to act. However, few of the news stories address the positive impacts investments in scientific research have on so many aspects of our lives – from public health to economic stability to national security. Nor do these stories address the consequences that come from jeopardizing the funding for these essential programs.

Help AGU spread the message about the importance and impact of scientific research and development, and keep the spotlight on these issues, by submitting a letter to the editor to your local newspaper or other media outlet. To assist you in this effort, AGU has prepared a draft template that you can customize for use in your local media.

Tips for submitting the letter to the editor are listed below. If you need further assistance contact Joan Buhman, AGU's Manager of Strategic Communications at (202) 777-7509 or [jbuhman@agu.org](mailto:jbuhman@agu.org).

### **Submitting a Letter to the Editor**

When used to respond to a major, newsworthy issue that has been covered by a media outlet, a letter to the editor provides you with the opportunity to promote and/or defend the value of Earth and space science's contributions to public health and safety, global economic competitiveness and national security.

Letters to the editor can be submitted by anyone, though not all letters that are submitted will be printed. Your letter should offer a personal opinion on a specific issue that has (or, specifically, has not) been covered by the outlet. When they are printed and/or posted online, letters to the editor are often presented in groups, representing both sides of any given argument – this balance of opinions is a staple of good journalism, and should not be seen as a critique of your effort.

Here are three simple steps for preparing a letter to the editor:

1. Review publications in your community to determine which ones accept letters to the editor and their preferred formats. This information can typically be found on the outlet's website.
2. Prepare a draft. The average letter to the editor should run between 100 and 200 words (approximately three double-spaced, typed paragraphs), and the signature should include the author's current professional title. If it is not indicated by their title, the author should also be identified by the type of work they do (e.g., an Earth or space scientist). You may use the attached draft as a guideline for your letter, adding localized information in the spaces indicated.
3. Submit the letter. Remember to follow the outlet's established guidelines, which can typically be found on their website. Submit the letter via the method they specify (e.g., online, via email, etc.). If they ask for contact info and your home address, provide it. And, most importantly, if

they give you a word limit, stick to it. By following these guidelines you increase the chances of having your letter chosen for publication.

Here is a template you may want to use. Remember, before you submit the letter, make sure that you have filled in all of the personal information requested in brackets ([ ]), and that you have deleted any extraneous notes or bracketed information that is not a part of your letter. Additional information about the proposed cuts can be found here: [http://www.agu.org/sci\\_pol/](http://www.agu.org/sci_pol/).

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Debate over the nation's budget continues to rage on both sides of the aisle, but there has been little serious discussion of the severe impact proposed cuts to scientific programs and research will have on our economy, not to mention the safety and welfare of all Americans.

For example, in the [DATE AND/OR TITLE] story, [Insert an example, either positive or negative, from the outlet's recent coverage (within one to two days of your letter) of the current budget debates—e.g., a story that talks about proposed cuts to healthcare and defense spending, but that does not mention the cuts that pose direct threats to Earth and space science or research and development, such as the Joint Polar Satellite System or NSF grants). This entire paragraph should not be longer than 60 words. If possible, try to mention your representative or senator by name. Most members of Congress track local news stories that mention their name. By mentioning them in your letter you increase the chances that they will see what you wrote, thus broadening the overall reach of your message. If you can't find a way to incorporate their name into your letter, that's OK. Your letter can be successful without such a specific reference.]

Much of the economic growth we have enjoyed since World War II is the result of investments in science and technology. What kind of legacy will we be leaving our children and our grandchildren if we fail to maintain that same level of leadership today?

We need to reduce the national debt, but doing it by sacrificing programs that protect public safety and national security, create jobs and support global competitiveness is a mistake.

Sincerely,

[NAME]

Member, American Geophysical Union

[TITLE & COMPANY OR OCCUPATION]

[ADDRESS – Must be within the outlet's 'reading area'; preferably home, but work is OK]

[PHONE NUMBER – Should be one you can be reached on quickly, in case they need to contact you with questions. Cell is OK]

[EMAIL ADDRESS – Should be one you check regularly, in case they need to contact you with questions.]