

A Letter of Concern About a Local Issue **Level 4, Sample 1****A**

May 29, 2001
Minister of the Environment

Dear Sir,

I am writing in concern about the government plans to build a 1.8km. highway through ██████ Park. The building of the highway will affect the environment, threatening many rare plant and animal species. As a nearby resident, I often visit the park. My friends and I camp there several times during the summer and my whole family enjoys skiing there during the winter. Local residents of all ages appreciate the protected natural environment and the thousands of tourists who visit the park each year do so as well. There are many quiet trails for hiking and bicycles and clean lakes for swimming. On weekends many local residents go to the park for picnics or just to enjoy nature. I believe that it is important to preserve the natural parks of Canada. They are part of our heritage and we want to protect them for our own children.

The highway planned is an extension of an existing highway and it is designed to link three cities. Conservationists argue that the highway will destroy some of the oldest trees in Eastern Canada. It will cross two beaver ponds and the ramps will destroy a nesting site of rare Cooper's hawks. Many other species of plants and animals will be affected. The reason for building the highway is to reduce travel time. Are people so busy that they are willing to wipe out rare animal species like the southern flying squirrel and the western chorus frog forever, just to save a few minutes a day? Why should tax money (\$45 million dollars) be spent on the highway when it could be used to protect the environment?

The government however, says that it is too early to say where the highway will go through the park. The government wants a consultant's report on where the ramps should be placed, so that they would have the least environmental impact. It also wants a list of all the plant and animal species that will be affected. The transportation ministry began public

B

hearings and the Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans will be involved because a wetland may be affected. They say all these measures would minimize the damage by deciding where the highway should best be built in the park.

Is it possible to build a highway through the park without cutting down large numbers of the very old and rare trees like the white pines that grow throughout the park? Some of these are 500 years old! Is it possible to build the highway without disturbing nests and destroying rare plant life? Are the frogs and turtles going to survive in the wetlands with all the noise and pollution caused by the traffic on the highway? I don't think so.

I believe that the highway should not be built through the park at all. The fact that the plan for the highway was approved ten years ago and is still not started shows that a new road is not needed urgently. An information sheet should be sent out to local residents explaining the environmental issues. Are they really willing to sacrifice an important part of their heritage for yet another highway? I think that when people understand the issues, they will agree with my solution. The highway could be built around the park. This would be more costly and would be a longer route for motorists certainly, but a very special part of our environment would remain protected!

I strongly suggest that the government take another look at this issue.

Sincerely,
A Concerned Citizen

Bibliography

“Road will kill whole ecosystem.” ██████ Citizen 18 Apr. 2001: B1.

“█████ is failing ██████ Park.” ██████ Citizen 2 May 2001: F5.

www.thecitizen.com/city/010418

www.capcan.ca/█████

www.█████.cbc.ca/editorServlets

Teacher’s Notes

Knowledge/Understanding

- The student demonstrates a high degree of understanding of the civic issue, as illustrated by the following:
 - The issue is clearly identified (e.g., “government plans to build a 1.8km. highway through ... Park ... will affect the environment, threatening many rare plant and animal species”).
 - The student provides an excellent explanation of why the issue is of concern to the community (e.g., “There are many quiet trails for hiking and bicycles and clean lakes for swimming. On weekends many local residents go to the park for picnics or just to enjoy nature.”; “Local residents of all ages appreciate the protected natural environment ...”).

Thinking/Inquiry

- The student demonstrates a high degree of ability to conduct critical analysis, describing the safeguards proposed by the government (e.g., “The government wants a consultant’s report on where the ramps should be placed, so that they would have the least environmental impact.”) and concluding that these are insufficient (e.g., “Are the frogs and turtles going to survive in the wetlands with all the noise and pollution caused by the traffic on the highway? I don’t think so.”).
- The student uses inquiry skills with a high degree of effectiveness, conducting substantial research and using the information to clarify the issue and the proposed solution (e.g., discusses the park as host to specific species of animals, vulnerable wetlands, very old trees, and nesting sites for rare birds to support his or her contention that the highway should not be built in the park).

Communication

- The student uses tone and language with a high degree of effectiveness, as illustrated by the following:
 - The letter is clearly written, sentence structure is skilfully varied, and a number of effective rhetorical questions are posed (e.g., “Are people so busy that they are willing to wipe out rare animal species like the southern flying squirrel and the western chorus frog forever, just to save a few minutes a day?”).

- The student’s language and tone contribute very effectively to the persuasiveness of the argument (e.g., “... it is important to preserve the natural parks of Canada. They are part of our heritage and we want to protect them for our own children.”).
- There are only a few errors in punctuation and grammar (e.g., “The government however, says ...”; “these measures would minimize the damage by deciding where the highway should best be built”).

Application

- The student makes connections with a high degree of effectiveness, as illustrated by the following:
 - The student proposes a realistic and reasonable solution (i.e., advocates constructing the proposed highway outside the park and building community support for this plan by educating people about the new road’s potential impact on the environment).
 - The student recognizes that there would be disadvantages for the community if the route for the highway were moved (e.g., notes that building the road outside the park “would be more costly” and would result in “a longer route for motorists”) but argues convincingly that these considerations are outweighed by the advantages of preserving the park for future generations.

Comments/Next Steps

- This is a highly effective and persuasive letter: the issue is well researched and the student’s concerns are articulated in a coherent and convincing manner.
- The student could provide additional detail to explain the viewpoint of the proponents of the government’s plan to build a highway through the park.
- The student should proofread more carefully to catch errors in punctuation and grammar.

A Letter of Concern About a Local Issue

Level 4, Sample 2

A

June 5, 2001
Minister of Finance

Dear Minister of Finance,

I am writing this letter in regard to the high price of gasoline and heating oil. The cost of these resources impacts on the daily lives of all Canadian citizens, with the biggest impact on poor and middle class people. I live in a small rural community where there are a number of people living on small fixed incomes, many of them retired. The Farmer's Almanac predicts a very cold winter and these people are seriously concerned about the increased cost of heating their homes during the long winter months. As well, a local factory closed down several months ago which employed many local residents. Some of these people found employment in other towns but it means that they are required to commute long distances. As gasoline prices continue to increase, without comparable salary increases, these people have less real spending money. Increased fuel costs have a negative effect on other sectors of my community as well, such as stores, restaurants and small contractors. They all report that sales are down in letters to the editor of our local newspaper. This is no surprise as people have less money to spend on goods, services and entertainment. The price of gas and heating oil is an important factor that contributes to making the cost of living more expensive.

I know that there are various factors that influence the cost of fuel to the consumer. For example, the price of crude oil has a direct influence on the retail price of petroleum products. Refining and transportation costs also affect the retail price. Unfortunately, as fuel costs increase, transportation costs increase, and as transportation costs increase, fuel costs increase. This increases fuel prices. High government taxation increases the cost of gasoline and heating oil as well.

Some argue that maintaining a high cost for fuel is good for the environment. People tend to drive less when the prices at the gas pumps are high and therefore pollution is reduced. Also, taxes on fuel provide a lot of money for the Federal Government and that allows them to spend money on important projects like helping farmers and health care. On the other hand, many people argue that

B

taxes on fuel are too high and so the poorest families are suffering and cannot afford their heating bills. People in rural communities such as mine have to rely on their cars and trucks for transportation because there is no alternative. Although some supporters of the high tax on fuel argue that the money could be spent on improving public transportation, that would be a solution for cities, but would not solve the problem in small towns.

Some people in my community suggest that we stop exporting Canadian oil and use our own resources at home. They think this would reduce costs. This is not a good solution because oil from Alberta cannot be sent to the eastern provinces without huge transportation costs, so this would not reduce oil and gas prices. There has been some talk of building a pipe-line across the country. I think this may be a good solution for the future, but it would take a long time and a lot of money, so it would not help people today.

My proposal is to reduce government taxes on oil and gas. Obviously the government does need some tax money to build new roads and improve transportation, but the taxes are too high. Gas and oil are not luxury items. Farmers need fuel to operate their machinery and people need money to heat their homes. Over 40% of the money we spend at the gas pumps goes for taxes. In 1995, the federal government had a deficit and added a 1.5 cent per litre tax on gas. The problem was solved, so this extra tax should be dropped immediately. The government should also remove the GST on heating oil.

This solution can work and is good for Canadians. It would help poor and lower income people with a solution that would make a real difference in their lives. It would ensure that people can afford to heat their homes and commute to jobs. I know it would make a big difference to the residents of my community and other small rural towns like mine. It is important to build roads and subway systems, which benefit some people, but there is also a time to consider the immediate needs of people, including those living in rural areas. This is one of those times. I politely request that you consider my solution.

Sincerely,
A Concerned Citizen

C

Bibliography

“Gas Tax Honesty Day” www.taxpayer.com/studies/federal

“Group calls for cuts to gas taxes” www.canoe.ca/CNEWSGas01/0524

“Don’t lower gasoline taxes” www.tcp.com

“Prices at pump fuel CPI rise” www.globeandmail

“Attention whiners: There is no energy crisis in Canada” www.tcp.com

Teacher’s Notes**Knowledge/Understanding**

- The student demonstrates a high degree of understanding of the civic issue, clearly explaining why the issue is a community concern (e.g., “people are seriously concerned about the increased cost of heating their homes during the long winter months”; “People in rural communities such as mine have to rely on their cars and trucks for transportation because there is no alternative.”).

Thinking/Inquiry

- The student conducts critical analysis with a high degree of ability, as illustrated by the following:
 - The student examines the positive side of high taxes on fuel (e.g., “People tend to drive less ... and therefore pollution is reduced”; “the money could be spent on improving public transportation”), but argues that such outcomes do not benefit rural communities.
 - The student effectively demonstrates the broader impact of high fuel prices (e.g., “Increased fuel costs have a negative effect on other sectors of my community”; “people have less money to spend on good, services and entertainment”).
 - The student outlines some alternative solutions being discussed in the community (e.g., using Canadian rather than foreign oil, building a pipeline), and clearly demonstrates why these solutions would not be effective.
- The student uses inquiry skills with a high degree of effectiveness, citing statistics to support the argument that fuel taxes are too high and to clarify his or her proposed solution (e.g., “Over 40% of the money we spend at the gas pumps goes for taxes.”; “In 1995, the federal government had a deficit and added a 1.5 cent per litre tax on gas ... this extra tax should be dropped immediately.”).

Communication

- The student uses language and tone with a high degree of effectiveness, as illustrated by the following:
 - The student presents information and expresses ideas clearly and concisely, and structures arguments logically (e.g., “Unfortunately, as fuel costs increase, transportation costs increase, and as transportation costs increase, fuel costs increase.”).
 - The letter elicits a positive response because the student writes both assertively (e.g., “It is important to build roads and subway systems, which benefit some people, but there is also a time to consider the immediate needs of people, including those living in rural areas. This is one of those times.”) and politely (e.g., “I politely request that you consider my solution.”).
 - The student’s syntax is occasionally somewhat awkward (e.g., “They all report that sales are down in letters to the editor ...”).

Application

- The student makes connections with a high degree of effectiveness, proposing a realistic and reasonable solution that takes into account the effect on the community (e.g., “It would help poor and lower income people ... It would ensure that people can afford to heat their homes and commute to jobs.”).

Comments/Next Steps

- This is a highly effective, well-written letter of concern.
- To strengthen his or her argument about the impact of high fuel prices, the student could include statistics on recent increases in gas and oil prices.
- The student might consider additional ways of reducing the price of gasoline. His or her proposal for a 1.5¢ per litre reduction in the tax on gasoline will have only a minor impact on gas prices.