

FIFTH DISTRICT REPORT
by U.S. Congressman Paul Tsongas

Since this is our inaugural "Fifth District Report", I think it is appropriate to discuss what this bi-weekly column is all about.

The purpose of this column is to provide for an exchange of ideas on important issues. The format of "Fifth District Report" will change from week to week. In addition to my own views on local and national issues, this column will, at various times, host a guest commentary, quote from a timely speech, request your opinion, or publish a sampling of constituent letters. It will not serve as a bulletin board for self-laudatory notices. You won't find stories about 'my week in Washington', or about the Cherry Blossom parade. I want this column to be a service to the constituents of the Fifth District.

A member of Congress has a variety of ways to communicate with those they serve. Included are commercial media, correspondence between individuals and myself, Congressional newsletters, and, of course, personal contact. Yet it is difficult for many constituents to keep up with their Congressman's voting record and priorities. With the help of this newspaper column, a semi-annual informational newsletter, and a series of "open meetings" in every community in the district, this communication gap can be bridged.

One of the most important means of communication available to members of Congress is the use of the "franking privilege". Basically, this allows the mailing of non-political materials free of charge. The franking privilege is necessary in order to respond to the hundreds of letters a Congressman receives every week and to send out information that may be helpful to constituents in dealing with federal agencies. However, too often, the taxpayer's money is wasted with the mailing of either useless items or political material designed only to insure re-election of some members of Congress. In order to rectify this abuse of the franking privilege, I will soon introduce legislation which will prohibit the mass mailing of newsletters and similar literature 60 days before a primary election and 120 days before a general election. Presently, an incumbent can send an unlimited amount of mail during a primary and up to 28 days before a general election. Should this legislation fail to pass Congress, I intend to abide by these standards.

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In this first column I have discussed various means of communication between members of Congress and their constituents. In addition to exchanging views on issues, you may need assistance in cutting through bureaucratic red tape and in coping with the endless delays that always seem to occur when dealing with federal agencies. My Lowell, Lawrence, and Lexington offices operate expressly to deal with these type of problems. I hope you will not hesitate to contact the Congressional district office closest to you for help. Here are the office locations:

Lowell	Lawrence	Lexington
50 Kearney Square	469 Essex Street	185 Bedford Street
459-0101	683-5313	862-1847

Again, I would urge you to let me know how you feel about the issues that face the Congress. Special interest lobbyists in Washington are used to giving Congressman all the 'advice' they need. The people I need to hear more from are people like you.