

A Beginner's Guide to Blogging and Internet Activism

The internet is having a greater and greater impact on political decisions by local and state government. Issues like public sector budgets, union contracts, collective bargaining rights, freedom to form unions, and privatization are often subjects of hot debate on blogs and media web sites.

The purpose of this flyer is to give AFSCME Iowa members an introduction to online activism and help you bring a pro-public service perspective to the debates taking place online.

What Are Blogs?

Activist blogs started becoming a prominent force in politics about 5 years ago. The word started as a slang term for Web Log, and now has become part of the language.

There are millions of people blogging. The blogs are collectively known as the "blogosphere." There are blogs devoted



to every conceivable interest. In the world of political blogs, there are blogs that specialize in national politics and ones that focus

on particular states or local communities. Blogs may be published by a single individual or by a group.

Some blogs allow readers to post comments in response to entries. Many of the most popular ones allow readers to make their own diaries, to which others can reply with comments. These blogs create communities of interest that can sometimes be politically influential.

Some of the most popular blogs focused on Iowa subjects are:

www.bleedingheartland.com
www.blogforiowa.com
www.essentialstrogen.com
jdeeth.blogspot.com
commoniowan.blogspot.com

As you explore, you will find other blogs and web sites that interest you.

Two sites that provide a lot of useful information are: iowaindependent.com & www.iowapolitics.com

The Iowa House Majority has created a blog at iowahouse.org – comments on articles posted at this site will reach legislators, media and the general public.

Media Websites

As the blogs became more and more popular, the mainstream media has developed web sites that have become more blog-like. Newspapers now post their articles online and encourage readers to register an account and post comments. Reporters and opinion leaders read these comments from ordinary citizens.



Articles on budgets and taxes often prompt extreme anti-government activists to post falsehoods and slurs about public employees and unions. It is important that public employees and union supporters be there to respond with the truth.

Even if you get your newspaper delivered in print at home, it's a good idea to go to your paper's website and post your comments to articles that relate to our issues. These are a few of the major Iowa newspaper web sites:

www.desmoinesregister.com
www.gazetteonline.com
www.press-citizen.com
www.qctimes.com

More Iowa newspaper sites are listed at www.50states.com/news/iowa.htm

Online Advocacy Tips

- The most compelling and effective online posts combine a thoughtful approach to the issues with a careful explanation of why it's important to you personally. Explain how the public services you provide contribute to the quality of life in your community.
- Explain how adequate funding and staffing is essential to providing reliable quality services.
- Talk about how making investments in health, education and public safety makes Iowa a better place to live and will improve our future standard of living.
- Respond to the substance of opponents' arguments with logical arguments of your own.
- Do not respond to name-calling or personal attacks in kind. We want to take the high road, and persuade people with the strength of our arguments.



E-Activist Alerts

Another way to be an online activist is to sign up for AFSCME Iowa Council 61 TEAM alerts. Just go to the AFSCME web site www.afscmeiowa.org, and click on the link for the AFSCME Iowa Action Center. Your email will be added to AFSCME TEAM list.

Starting Your Own Blog

You may find that you have so much to say that you decide to join the "blogosphere" yourself! There are online platforms for you to easily set up your own blog at no cost. Two of the most popular are WordPress.com and Blogger.com

(For more information, contact AFSCME Council 61 communication specialist, Andy English at aenglish@afscmeiowa.org)