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Advocacy and Fracking

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Jennifer Barry, Fall 2015

Introduction

Advocacy, or promoting or reinforcing a change in policy, program or legislation, is important because it is how the public can become more informed about current issues. Without activists spreading awareness of hydraulic fracturing's, or fracking's, adverse implications, the public wouldn't know they could be at risk.

As data demonstrating the dangers of hydraulic fracturing grows, it is important for everyone to have resources they can use if they want to join the anti-fracking movement. College students should be informed about these issues so they can take action if they want encourage their institutions to divest fracking activities or start a rally on campus. Since there are various advocacy methods, everyone can get involved in their own way depending on their commitment to the cause.

Very often, the public feels hopeless from negative news coverage, especially as it relates to their health or the environment. By hearing about advocates' successes, the public can rest easier knowing people are trying to enact positive changes in the world.

Advocacy against fracking is important because the bigger the movement, the larger the impact it has on legislation. The more vocal people are against fracking, the more likely politicians will fight for changes in current governmental regulations.

Main Discussion

Hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, is a controversial method for extracting natural gas from the ground, "where millions of gallons of water, sand and chemicals are pumped underground to break apart the rock and release the gas" (Granberg, 2008). Citizens, grassroots organizations, coalitions, and celebrities have all been advocating to end fracking. Through channels such as films, newspapers, television, environmental magazines, the Internet, and political calls to action, these varied groups hope their advocacy efforts will put a stop to hydraulic fracturing in the United States and around the globe.

Hydraulic fracturing has been in existence since 1949, but only recently has there been controversy. Previously, fracking was applied to conventional pipes with vertical wells. Now, due to advances in technology, horizontal wells are drilled and fracked, on a much larger scale (U.S. Department of Energy, 2015). Those who oppose fracking believe the process can contaminate a local water supply with harmful chemicals if fracking liquids seep into the groundwater. In addition, it is believed that fracking greatly disturbs local communities with heavy truck traffic, dust, land disruptions, and loss of property values. Fracking is also opposed because of the locations of the shale formations being drilled. Chemical engineer Robert Rapier states, "One of these formations is the Marcellus Shale, which lies underneath parts of New York, Pennsylvania, eastern Ohio, western Maryland, and West Virginia -- many areas with high

population density that weren't used to oil and gas exploration. I suspect that if the Marcellus was underneath Wyoming, the majority of the country would have still never heard of fracking” (Rapier, 2014). As a result of this opposition, activism against fracking developed.

Groups Involved in Advocacy

Before large-scale groups emerged, anti-fracking advocacy started with like-minded individuals joining together to fight locally. These grassroots movements-- “movement[s] that develop[ed] organically at a local level before spreading throughout the state and even the country-- helped spread the anti-fracking message across the country” (Manuel, 2015). In New York, for example, grassroots groups such as “United for Action” based in New York City and citizens of Dryden, NY, rallied their neighbors and friends to fight for the cause in their hometowns (Weltman, 2015). All of these groups had the same goal, to stop fracking in New York.

When small grassroots organizations gain traction, the next step is to merge these groups into coalitions. In New York, for example, grassroots groups such as the “Hispanic Community of Great Neck” and “Concerned Citizens of Montauk” joined more than 250 other organizations to form “New Yorkers Against Fracking” (New Yorkers Against Fracking, 2012). On June 29, 2015, with the help of these coalitions, the New York Department of Environmental Conservation officially banned fracking in the state after the announcement in 2014 from Governor Andrew Cuomo (NY Department of Environmental Conservation, 2015).

Coalitions against fracking aren’t just prevalent in New York. As the fight against fracking continues throughout the country, more coalitions are forming. “Americans against Fracking” is a national coalition that encompasses 250 environmental groups ranging from well-known organizations such as Greenpeace to small groups like “Alameda County Against Fracking” in California (Americans Against Fracking). Coalitions such as these transform small factions into a unified front to combat fracking. As a result, these groups create a massive movement and can influence government and society overall.

Advocacy groups aren’t just made up of regular citizens. Celebrities have also joined the fight against fracking. A coalition called “Artists Against Fracking” was formed with countless famous members such as Yoko Ono, Mark Ruffalo, and Gwyneth Paltrow (Artists Against Fracking). When celebrities get behind a cause, it makes a huge difference due to their influence in society. Having celebrities support an issue raises public awareness. Just one fracking tweet from Mark Ruffalo will instantaneously reach his 2.01 million followers. Instead of just talking about fracking issues, some organizations boast which famous names back them. These organizations believe celebrities will raise more public support than just using fracking statistics.

Education

These individuals, grassroots organizations, and coalitions all have the same goal: to put an end to fracking. The most important step these groups have taken so far has been to educate the public on the current situation. Activists believe that once people know all the harmful effects of fracking, they will be against it as well. Activists use films as one method to display problems to the public. *Gasland*, and more recently *Gasland II*, are well-known documentaries created by



GASLAND Trailer 2010

Figure 1: This image is from the trailer of the documentary *Gasland* that uncovered issues with fracking. To view the trailer, visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZe1AeH0Qz8.

Josh Fox that reveal serious problems with fracking. As seen in the trailer, when Fox was offered money to have his land drilled, he decided to look into the impact it would have. Both documentaries provide personal accounts of towns being negatively impacted by fracking and how current government regulations aren't keeping Americans safe (GASLAND, 2010). "Josh Fox's *Gasland* blew the doors off what was happening, raising awareness a tremendous amount. It had a big impact on growing the movement," said Mark Schlosberg, national organizing director for Food & Water Watch, in a recent interview with EcoWatch" (Ecowatch, 2013).

Promised Land, a feature film starring Matt Damon and John Krasinski, also opened the public's eyes to fracking. This movie told a story of a natural gas company trying to secure drilling rights in a small rural town. Through celebrity involvement and media tours, this film informed new audiences about fracking and brought the issue into public discourse (Sant, 2013). While these are the most cited fracking films, many others have been created such as *The Ethics of Fracking* and *Triple Divide* (Cannon, 2014; Pribanic, 2011). A pro-fracking documentary was even created called *FrackNation* to try and lessen the impact the anti-fracking movement was having on public opinion (McAleer, 2013). These anti-fracking films and many others that followed used imagery in a way that enabled the public to grasp the issues fracking brought to the table.

While these documentaries were very successful in getting the movement to the main stage, they weren't what kept the issues in everyone's minds. In today's society, people get their news from a variety of outlets. Mainstream newspapers and television broadcasts are read and watched throughout the country, but usually only focus on breaking news stories due to their limited space or airtime. It is difficult for fracking advocates to gain traction in traditional newspapers and on television because these outlets don't want to spend time explaining the issues to the public unless a specific incident takes place.

Environmental magazines and cable television shows, on the other hand, are more flexible and can focus on issues they care about. Magazines such as *The Nature Conservancy*, *Sierra*, and *Mother Earth News* provide environmental updates and in-depth investigative reporting to their readers (Cision, 2011). These magazines are very informative, but are usually only read by those who are interested in environment in the first place.

Unlike these environmental magazines, cable shows provide a general overview of environmental issues to a wide audience. Comedy Central's *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and HBO's *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* both aired segments focused on fracking. On March 27, 2014, *The Daily Show* aired "The Benefits of Fracking", with the tagline "Following Chevron's lead, Aasif Mandvi assuages tremendous and growing fracking concerns with pizza" (Stewart). John Oliver's October 12, 2015 episode was focused on the need to increase fracking regulations in North Dakota, stating: "North Dakota is known for being polite, but perhaps

they've been a little too hospitable to oil companies" (Oliver). Through comedy, cable television shows are able to expand the knowledge of those who were previously unaware of fracking and its negative impacts.

Due to the time and space constraints of traditional media outlets, advocates tend to rely heavily on online media. Since the Internet is free to use, all advocates from individuals to large coalitions have the opportunity to share information about the issues of fracking. According to Google Trends, global searches for the word "fracking" have been on an upward trend since

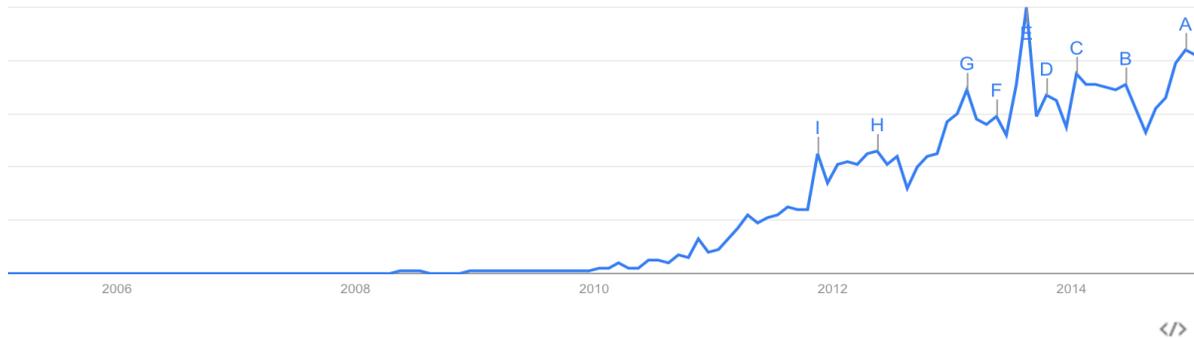


Figure 2: This graph demonstrates the upward trend of the term "fracking" on Google globally from January 2005- January 2015 (Google Trends).

2010. Fracking subtopics such as the definition, locations, earthquakes, oil, and water are currently rising as popular fracking searches as well (Google Trends). This proves that fracking is becoming a more discussed topic that the public wants to be informed about.

Why did the public become interested in fracking in 2010? This is likely due the rise in dominance of social media. A video showing a shower on fire due to chemicals in the water can be shared on Facebook; an image of a family suffering from inhalation problems can be posted on Instagram; and a local governmental ruling on fracking can be tweeted, all with the click of a button. According to data from the Pew Research Center, 74% of all Internet users use social networking sites including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and

Who uses social networking sites

% of internet users within each group who use social networking sites

All internet users	74%
a Men	72
b Women	76
a 18-29	89 ^{cd}
b 30-49	82 ^{cd}
c 50-64	65 ^d
d 65+	49
a High school grad or less	72
b Some college	78
c College+	73
a Less than \$30,000/yr	79
b \$30,000-\$49,999	73
c \$50,000-\$74,999	70
d \$75,000+	78

Pew Research Center's Internet Project January Omnibus Survey, January 23-26, 2014. Note: Percentages marked with a superscript letter (e.g., ^a) indicate a statistically significant difference between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter, among categories of each demographic characteristic (e.g., age).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 3: A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center demonstrates the high percentage of social network users on the Internet (Pew Research Center, 2014).

LinkedIn. Based on these findings, it isn't only younger or educated people who have taken a liking to social networking. In addition, 49% of those who are 65 and over use social media, and the highest education level for all users is those who haven't completed college (Pew Research Center, 2014). No wonder anti-fracking advocates have jumped at the opportunity to educate the public with these tools.

According to a study conducted by the Energy & Sustainability Department at Makovsky, a New York public relations firm, "... 57% of U.S. consumers believe that fracking is one of the three most important environmental issues today. Furthermore, 71% of the survey's respondents say they hear about the issue at least every week and 79% say they hear about it primarily from social media (Carufel, 2014)."

Political Calls to Action

Anti-fracking advocates appreciate the importance of educating the public, but understand that awareness isn't enough to enact change. That is why these different groups use political calls to action to influence political decisions. Partaking in the anti-fracking movement involves many different forms of participation. The highest number of activist participation occurs online. Hashtags are used on Twitter to gather individual accounts into specific trending topics. #NotOneWell was used in New York to gather support for banning fracking in all parts of the state (#NotOneWell, 2015). Online petitions are also used to show politicians there is support for the movement, whether it is for stricter regulations, increased environmental violation penalties or even statewide bans. These petitions are then shared on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter to gain signatures and support. According to the *Fordham Journal of Corporate & Financial Law*, "About 500 million tweets are sent every day. This social media platform can be a powerful force for enabling collective action in modern society" (Oranburg, 2015). A petition or viral hashtag campaign can thus gain popularity very quickly.

While a majority of anti-fracking advocates only provide virtual support, the most active advocates continue to pursue the more traditional approaches to fight against fracking as well. Even though online petitions are popular, activists still petition in person. These people stand in crowded areas and try to gain as many signatures as they can, while continuing to educate the public at the same time. This allows activists to talk face-to-face with the public and ensure they understand the issues.

Another popular tactic is bird-dogging during election campaigns. "Bird-dogging is when organizers, volunteers, and other activists attend every event on the Governor's [or other politicians'] released schedule and directly ask him [or her] to ban fracking (Leap, 2015)." This pressure eventually forces candidates to take a stance on hydraulic fracturing before the election. When New Yorkers were trying to ban fracking, they jumped at the opportunity to use bird-dogging on Governor Cuomo during his re-election campaign. Since reporters attend political events as well, it is also a way to gain publicity from the media. After elections are over, similar tactics can be used to constantly put pressure on the government. Letters can be sent and call-in days can be implemented where groups all call the same politicians requesting new fracking regulations (Leap, 2015).

In addition to these constant political calls to action, demonstrations, protests, and marches are all organized to advance the movement. One example is “Global Frackdown,” an annual day of action started in 2012 that encourages the world to stop fracking. On this day, marches are held around the world to protest the current harmful practices (Global Frackdown). Demonstrations like these prove that despite all of the distinct organizations and online groups, there is a strong and united unit willing and able to take charge against fracking.



Sean Lennon, Yoko Ono, and Artists Against Fracking Present: "Don't Frack My Mother"

Figure 4: This image is from the music video "Don't Frack My Mother" that is fighting against fracking. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=VfymhAEe-TM to view the video.

Celebrities are useful in influencing political discourse of the issues as well. Yoko Ono, for example, used a combination of online and physical means to encourage political engagement. She started Artists Against Fracking, wrote songs, developed artwork, and gave speeches. One example is the music video “Don't Frack My Mother” she created with Sean Lennon and the Artists Against Fracking Coalition. This video was a mashup of famous celebrities singing about the dangers of fracking in New York (ArtistsvsFracking, 2013). Ono and other celebrities were doing more than just educating; they were encouraging the public to support the anti-

fracking ideal as well. “Seven months after Artists Against Fracking formed, a March Quinnipiac University poll found that, for the first time, New Yorkers opposed fracking, 45 to 39 percent...”(Marcovici, 2013).

Despite all of the varied groups and approaches to anti-fracking advocacy, there is one constant characteristic of all successful players. It is the persistent attitude to keep fighting for the cause. Whether it is an individual who posts about the news each day or a coalition that holds marches, the key to victory is unwavering effort and determination. With increased advocacy, the public can be more informed about hydraulic fracturing and can learn how it relates to their communities. People can feel empowered to enact change by electing politicians who support their views and fight for divestments in harmful environmental activities. With so many varied advocacy methods, everyone can get involved in their own way to make a difference and help stop fracking. Using a mix of traditional and online approaches, these groups have the power to make the movement stronger than it has ever been in the fight against hydraulic fracturing.

Interview

Jill Hopke is an Assistant Professor of Journalism in the in the College of Communication at DePaul University in Chicago with a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her research focuses on environmental communication and social media. The focus of this interview is on her Twitter analysis during the 2013 Global Frackdown, “a transnational day

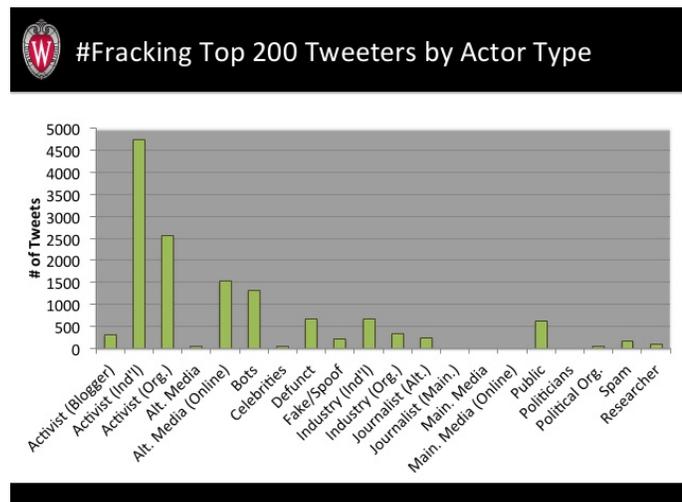
of action calling for a ban on the drilling technology” For more information on Jill Hopke’s research, please visit <http://www.jillhopke.com/research/publications/> (Hopke).

Q: You mentioned in your research that Twitter connected a lot of local groups. Do you think it also did a good job of reaching people who didn't know about the movement?

A: I think that it was more about bringing together core activists that were working on fracking in their local communities. For example, I've talked to some European activists in Sweden as part of a group called Heaven or Shell. Sweden was the first place within Europe where there was shale gas exploration. This group was successful in getting Shell Gas Company to ban the exploration project. One of the things the activists told me is that when they were starting out, there wasn't any information. They didn't know what shale gas was, why it was being explored in their region, or the drilling techniques behind it. Through social media, they were able to build connections and go from an isolated localized group of around 10 core activists to part of a transnational network. This network helped those in Sweden understand fracking and gain valuable information for their movement.

Q: The “#Fracking Top 200 Tweeters by Actor Type” graph shows that activists were tweeting the most during the Global Frackdown. Do you think that this group was also the most influential?

A: I'm doing some additional research where a colleague and I are looking at that kind of a question about amplification effect in terms of what kinds of tweets or what kinds of messages get amplified more or are likely to be amplified. One thing that was interesting from that graph



is that the activist organizations and individuals who were sending the most tweets were also receiving the most. So this supports this idea that a lot of the conversation is driven by and directed toward other activists.

Figure 5: This is a slide from Jill Hokpe’s presentation titled “Discourse Over a Contested Technology on Twitter: A Case Study of Hydraulic Fracturing.” To view the presentation visit http://www.slideshare.net/jillhopke?utm_campaign=profiletracking&utm_medium=sssite&utm_source=ssslideview

Q: Were industry actors not as active only during the Global Frackdown or is it a general trend that they're not active?

A: I can say for sure that it wasn't during the Global Frackdown. We collected our data during a specific period of time. It was a particular moment in which we captured the data because it was associated with this day of global action. One thing that was really striking about the results from the study is that we didn't find that there was much because participation by industry or by industry supporters. When researching hashtags, we included a couple which we believed would be industry hashtags: #natgas, #shale, #shalegas and a couple from the activists such as #GlobalFrackdown.

The natgas and shale hashtags were pro-shale while #GlobalFrackdown was anti-shale. From this we found what was called "hashtag publics," which are distinct communities of discourse that were taking place simultaneously from each other. There wasn't much evidence that they were overlapping in constructive ways or talking to each other.

Q: What is the reason for these "hashtag publics"?

A: The framing is different from industry and activists. For example, when you look at oil company Halliburton's website you can see they are using different rhetoric. The activists and industry supporters are using different language to talk about the issue. On a social media platform like Twitter, which is based on a hashtagging index function, these groups aren't interacting with each other. There just wasn't much exchange between anti-fracking activists and individuals or organizations that were supportive of fracking.

Q: What do you think will be the future trend in environmental activism?

A: We will continue to see the challenge of how to spread your message when there is such a high volume of content out there. This is what PR professional Mark Shaffer calls, "content shock." He speaks of how you need to leverage these platforms to make the most out of your content. I think that we will continue to see social media platforms as a resource and a mechanism for activists to make connections with each other.

Another trend comes from the global adoption of smartphones including in the rural south. We've gone from approximately one third of U.S. adults having smart phones to two thirds in the past five years. So we've just seen an exponential increase in access to the technology. And with that comes capability to record video like we've seen with the Black Lives Matter movement. What a difference it makes to have audio and video evidence. Being able to have those tools in your back pocket, quite literally, is really changing activism both in terms of environmental activism, but also activism more broadly. I think we'll continue to see those trends.

Important Individuals, Groups, and Organizations

Hugh MacMillian

Hugh MacMillian has been a senior researcher on water, energy and climate issues at *Food and Water Watch* since 2011 with a current concentration on fracking in the United States. MacMillian is important to the anti-fracking movement because he curates the government and corporate documents related to fracking. Lobbyists use this information to present anti-fracking arguments to politicians and the general public. Previously, MacMillian was a legislative fellow and science advisor in the U.S. Senate and an assistant professor in the Department of Mathematical Sciences at Clemson University. He received his Ph.D. in applied mathematics from the University of Colorado at Boulder. Hugh MacMillian can be reached at hmacmillan@fwwatch.org.

Yoko Ono - Artists Against Fracking

Artists Against Fracking is an anti-fracking coalition with nearly 200 famous members. Yoko Ono and Sean Lennon founded this organization in 2012 to ban fracking in the state of New York. Using their celebrity status, they were able to push the issues of fracking into mainstream media and help successfully convince Governor Cuomo to ban fracking in New York. It is important to look at Artists Against Fracking when talking about advocacy because they are a perfect case study on how celebrities can enact governmental change. Using some of their tactics, such as creating videos with famous actors or holding press conferences, can assist other groups in banning fracking in their own towns. While you cannot contact Yoko Ono directly, you can reach the Facebook managers of Artists Against Fracking at <https://www.facebook.com/ArtistsAgainstFracking/>

Josh Fox

Josh Fox is a writer, director, producer, and activist best known for his documentaries *Gasland* and *Gasland II*. Fox is important to the anti-fracking movement because he achieved great success in educating the dangers of fracking to the public through his films. Fox created *Gasland* because fracking was occurring in his town and he wanted to know if there would be negative repercussions for him or his neighbors. Using his personal experience as well as investigating reporting, Fox was able to expose many issues that the public was previously unaware of. To this day, Fox is a major anti-fracking activist and continues to fight against fracking through film. To get in touch Josh Fox and others involved in the creation of these films visit <http://www.gaslandthemovie.com/contact>.

Julie Ann Edgar

Julie Ann Edgar is the current organizer of Lehigh Valley Gas Truth, a 200-member grassroots organization in the Lehigh Valley of Pennsylvania. After watching Josh Fox's *Gasland*, Edgar became inspired to work toward having safe and accessible renewable energy sources. Edgar has completed over 5,000 volunteer hours throughout the country and is an expert on the complexities of fracking. She also works with *Berks Gas Truth* and *the Safe Water Society*. You can contact Julie Ann Edgar at julie@safewatersociety.org or 484-557-4182.

New Yorkers Against Fracking

New Yorkers Against Fracking is a coalition of all organizations, groups, businesses, and institutions that support a ban on fracking in New York. New Yorkers Against Fracking is important because they were one of the key players that worked to ban fracking in the state of New York. Unlike Artists Against Fracking, those who make up this group are regular concerned citizens. They all joined together in 2012 to fight against fracking due to its health risks. Even though fracking has been banned New York, New Yorkers Against Fracking still participates in the anti-fracking movement by being very active on social media. You can contact New Yorkers Against Fracking at organizers@nyagainstfracking.org

Go-to Websites

Google Trends

Google Trends is a website that allows you to research the popularity of Google Search terms over time. It is a simple application where you type any keyword and you receive data

analytics of its popularity through various graphs and maps. This website is useful when examining the popularity of a topic in public discourse such as fracking or the environment in general. <https://www.google.com/trends/>

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

New York uses this website to display all state governmental information on the environment. It is unbiased as it provides mostly factual information such as permit instructions and energy source data. It is a useful website for obtaining environmental press releases such as the announcement when they banned fracking across the state. www.dec.ny.gov/index.html

Ecowatch

Ecowatch is an environmental news website that often reports on fracking. They have sections for different environmental topics and provide unbiased insights on fracking studies. In addition, major players in the anti-fracking movement write articles as well. This is a good source for keeping up to date on new environmental research released in the United States. <http://ecowatch.com>

EarthJustice

EarthJustice is the nation's original and largest environmental law organization. This is an important resource to learn about the current legal situation with fracking. It is also useful to gain information on how to get involved in the anti-fracking movement. <http://earthjustice.org>

350.org Fracking

350.org is an environmental advocacy website with different sections devoted to each global issue. In the fracking section, you can view press releases, read news updates, and participate in advocacy campaigns and projects. This website provides a global view of fracking that is beneficial to everyone looking to get involved in the movement. <http://350.org/category/topic/fracking/>

Change.org

This website allows anyone to start an online petition that can easily be shared through email and social media. You can also search for petitions by topic to join movements you support. If you want to support a campaign, all you have to do is write your information since the work of writing a message is already done for you. <https://www.change.org/>

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