



CAMPAIGN COMMUNICATIONS TIPS

TIPS ON LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

- 1) **Keep it short** – Keeping your letter to about five reasonably short sentences will increase the chances of having it published, reduce the chance that it will be edited for length in a way you don't like, and make it more likely to be read if it is published.
- 2) **Connect it with news** – Your letter is more likely to get printed if it responds to an article that has recently appeared in the paper or an issue that is in the news.
- 3) **Make it timely** –The sooner you submit your letter after the original article is published, the better chance you have of getting it printed.
- 4) **Follow a basic format**
 - Put a short heading in the style that paper uses for its letters. The editors probably will put their own heading, but it doesn't hurt to try.
 - Start with an opening sentence that refers to the original article and highlights something that was missed or something you disagree with.
 - State your main point, referring to why you have credibility (“As a nurse for xx years...”)
 - Say what you think should be done or why the public should be concerned.
 - Sign it and include your address and phone number so the paper can contact you. There generally should be only one or two signers. Papers rarely will print letters with a long list of signers.
- 5) **Avoid an excessively negative tone** – Most papers will not print overly harsh attacks on anyone. That includes attacks on the newspaper itself.
- 6) **Connect your point to the public interest** – Use the opportunity not to state a special interest grievance but to show the reader why they would benefit if your position were listened to. Connect your point, for example, to quality services, secure health care, good jobs for the community, or some other public concern.
- 7) **Avoid union jargon** like takeaways, union-busting, etc.
- 8) **Show the letter to a few people not involved in the union** to see if you have used the right language and tone and appealed to the broader public interest.

Here are some sample letters to the editor that have been published and that applied these principles.

San Francisco Chronicle, June 5, 2001

Nursing home crisis

An 88-year-old friend of mine fell and broke her hip a year ago. She had surgery and was sent to an Oakland nursing home for postoperative recovery. I was very disturbed by the lack of care she received.

The health care workers were dedicated, but were overwhelmed by the number of patients they had to care for so they could not respond in a timely manner to her calls for pain medication. It took a small team of her friends to make sure my friend was taken care of.

The California Legislature has an opportunity to fix this nursing home crisis by passing AB1075 by Assembly member Kevin Shelley. This bill would require adequate staffing in nursing homes so friends and family can feel confident their loved ones are being taken care of.

Our elderly friends deserve better care.

CARLA WOODWORTH
Berkeley

Washington Post, August 16, 2001

Amnesty Works for America

Peter Skerry is incorrect when he argues that "the American people get nothing" from legalizing the status of undocumented immigrants [Outlook, Aug. 12]. All working families would benefit from immigration reform that provides legal status to immigrants who work hard and pay their taxes.

Our country depends on immigrant workers to care for our sick, clean our office buildings, harvest our food, and provide other essential services. Yet many of those workers face the threat of deportation if they ask employers to provide a living wage and health coverage for their families. That, in turn, makes it easier for employers to hold down pay and benefit levels for all working people.

Legalization would prevent employers from exploiting immigrant workers and improve working conditions for us all.

ANDREW L. STERN
Washington

The writer is president of the Service Employees International Union.

