

## **How to Tips on Using the Media to Influence Public Opinion**

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Sure we have all, at one time, contacted our legislators by mail, fax, phone or e-mail to state our opinions and ask for a vote for or against an issue of interest or concern. Have you ever thought of using your local newspaper to reach your legislator?

Writing letters to the editor or volunteering to author a guest editorial on an issue or piece of legislation is an excellent way to reach legislators.

Whether in the U. S. Capitol/Statehouse or back in the district, you can be sure that legislators carefully monitor what is printed in their district newspapers. Particularly careful attention is paid to the editorial pages of newspapers regardless of circulation size. Granted a lot of people do not read editorial pages of newspapers, but you can be sure that legislators do. Letters to the editor are a terrific way to state an opinion and mold public policy through the media.

Letters to the editor have impact in the following ways:

- They let your elected officials know an issue was important enough to you to state your stance on it publicly.
- Letters to the editor influence other readers to think about the issue and perhaps ask their elected officials questions or write a letter of their own; and
- Letters, even those not printed, can influence editorial decisions about what issues to assign to reporters.

Keep in mind that a letter to the editor in response to a particular article in a previous edition of the newspaper has the highest likelihood of being printed. You will also greatly improve your chances of publication by being very concise - making your point in three to four short paragraphs.

Media coverage of issues helps to raise their profile with legislators. Letters to the editor are an excellent tool to secure the media coverage that raises the profile of issues with legislators.