

## **Editors: Legionnaires Can Get Op-Eds in Local Publications**

Newspaper editors call it the "op-ed" page, space reserved for opinion columns from outside sources. But this page is a vital tool Legionnaires can use to further the cause of the flag protection and Show Your Colors, America! Campaign.

While it's true that most newspapers have syndicated columnists such as George Will or Robert Novak to tackle the global issues, what newspapers often lack and what they're eager to get is a strong "take" on the local angle of a national issue such as the flag protection amendment. If you can provide that in a readable format, you'd be surprised how good your odds are of selling the piece.

So, think local. Has there been a relevant flag related incident or news in your neighborhood, city, or state? "Relevant" doesn't necessarily mean an actual flag burning. Any incident having to do with the underlying values of the flag campaign qualifies: respect; discipline; law and order; service to country; many others as well.

For example, suppose a group of neighborhood teens has just been arrested for spray painting obscene graffiti on the local high school. You could actually go in any of several directions with this. You could write about the breakdown in respect for institutions in society, and tie that in to respect for the flag. You could talk about the need to instill proper values in our nation's youth, and use that as your bridge to the need for flag education. If you are at all creative in making these connections, the possibilities are endless.

A few more specifics:

- ) Timeliness is key. Link your article to some event that either just happened, or is about to. And plan ahead. Don't send in your Memorial Day story on May 20th. Newspaper editors plan "theme issues" well in advance.
- ) If you don't have a specific news peg, try to start off with a good anecdote. And if you're lucky enough to have both of these, you might begin: "As we look forward to Memorial Day, I was thinking about something that happened to me at the grocery store two weeks ago this humanizes the story and sets you apart from the competition.
- ) Don't make your point with a sledgehammer. Impress the editor with the quality of your thinking, not the quantity of your exclamation points.
- ) Don't make it sound like the people on the other side of the issue deserve to be shot. A lot of editors are on the other side of this issue; they'll take it personally.
- ) Don't make your opponents' arguments for them. Avoid lines like, "Opponents of the flag amendment say it infringes on free speech, but I believe... There's no need to say the part before the "but." Why use some of your precious space to plant a negative thought in readers' minds?
- ) Pay attention to the paper's tone. Is it folksy? Sophisticated? (Does it use contractions like "don't," "can't," "aren't"? Or does it spell the phrases out?) First

- impressions count. The closer your article is to the kind of material they already publish, the better the odds editors will think you're "our kind of people."
- \ Don't be intimidated by the craft of writing. Standards at most papers are not overly high. If you can put your thoughts together without breaking too many basic rules of grammar, your piece will receive a fair hearing.
  - \ Remember, your words don't have to be "literature." If they get the message across, you've done your job.

And in doing so, you will have accomplished your goal in promoting the flag amendment and enlisted the help of others to Show Your Colors, America!