



Guide to Communicating with the Media

WRITING “OP-EDS”

QUICK TIPS

Most newspapers and magazines publish opinion essays submitted by community leaders, experts, elected officials, and just plain citizens. Known generically as op-eds because they often appear opposite the editorial page, these items offer advocates an opportunity to make their case in their own words, drawing attention to a problem or a success, or an issue of general importance. They may not be the most read part of a newspaper, but those that read them tend to be the most influential opinion leaders in the community. An op-ed also carries with it the implicit endorsement of the paper as being an opinion to which it is important to pay attention.

Op-eds are short, 700-800 words maximum, but each paper that runs them determines its own guidelines for length, submission, topics, etc. Observe what type and style of op-ed is running, from whom, and see if they have published their guidelines either in the paper or on the paper's website.

Messengers: while you may be the best person to write an op-ed because of your knowledge on the issue, you may want to enlist someone prominent or influential in the community to submit it under their name. Ghost writing op-eds for others is very common. Sometimes it helps get the piece published or read because the person is well known. It can also help the power of your message because the person is looked up to, is an expert or academic, or because they have no obvious self-interest in the issue being discussed.

Basic Elements:

† **Grab their attention** – an opening paragraph should get the reader's attention and invite them to read on. Use strong, colorful language, humor, unusual examples, and establish what or who is at stake. Sympathetic anecdotes about the people that would be affected if action is taken, or not taken, are a good way to draw readers in.

† **State your case** – after grabbing the reader's attention, you need to move quickly to the position you are advocating. Be concise and clear (e.g., “Congress should enact _____ Act,” or “Senator Jones should support the bill.”). You want to structure your argument so that readers walk away agreeing with your position.

† The first two elements are the most important for getting readers to buy your point of view and for getting editors to publish the piece in the first place. Be creative and spend time getting these two right.

† **Your evidence** – the next several paragraphs provide supporting evidence and examples that develop your argument, but always connect back to the case you are making. Don't overload and make every argument in your arsenal. Rather, be succinct and give priority to the most important or compelling evidence. If forced to edit down a piece for space, start by trimming the less important evidence.

† **Provide a summation** – restate your case and underscore how each piece of evidence you have provided leads you to your logical conclusion. This part needs to draw the connection between the reader and the position you are taking. Why is it in the best self-interest of the reader to agree with your position? What's in it for them?

† **The closer** – again, the closing can be an opportunity to engage the reader, put a human face on the problem, state the consequences of not taking your position, or to end with a clever and memorable “zinger.”

† **About the author** – a one line description of who the author is should stress why they are qualified to advise the rest of us on what position we should take.

Be prepared for the paper to suggest edits for clarity or space. You do not have to accept the paper's suggestions, but the piece may not get published if you refuse. Most papers will give the writer an opportunity to review edits to a piece in advance if they are significant, but not all extend this courtesy.





JUSTICE FOR IMMIGRANTS *a journey of hope*

OP-ED SAMPLE

Bishop Gerald F. Kicanas: Frist should look deeper than border enforcement

Tucson, Arizona | Published: 07.28.2005

Since Operation Hold the Line was launched in El Paso in 1993, the U.S. government has pursued a border enforcement policy designed to deter unauthorized immigration by focusing human and technological resources at border ports of entry.

Since that time, the federal government has spent nearly \$23 billion, more than tripled the number of Border Patrol agents and erected close to 90 miles of new fencing in an effort to stop illegal entry across the border.

During the same period, about 2,700 migrants have perished in the desert, and the number of undocumented persons in the nation has doubled.

It is clear this border enforcement strategy has not deterred migrants from attempting, at great risk to their lives, to cross the border. The desire to find work and support a family is strong and does not melt away easily in the face of increased enforcement.

This is why I was concerned reading U.S. Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist's June 29

opinion piece in the Star, "Border protection needs fresh approach," in which he argues that more Border Patrol agents, detention facilities and beds, technology and fencing are needed to solve our immigration crisis.

I fully agree with Sen. Frist's assessment that the current state of affairs is disturbing to Americans, certainly Arizonans, and that certain criminal elements are present along our border. This country like any country needs to secure its borders and foster respect for the law.

Yet focusing U.S. policy primarily on enforcement does not address the root causes of migration or powerful "pull" factors, such as U.S. demand for foreign-born workers. The U.S. Catholic bishops have recommended several changes to our immigration laws that should be considered, including a program for undocumented workers in the United States to earn permanent residency over time; reform of our family-based immigration system to reduce waiting times for family reunification; and a new temporary-worker program that permits workers to enter the United States and work legally.

Creating legal avenues for foreign workers and family members to migrate in a safe and orderly manner would allow U.S. enforcement authorities to concentrate their resources on apprehending and prosecuting smugglers, drug and human traffickers and would-be terrorists. Moreover, attention should be paid to how U.S. trade and economic policies may be altered to encourage the creation of more and better paying jobs for foreign-born low-skilled workers in their countries of origin. I urge Sen. Frist, as majority leader of the U.S. Senate, to ask the appropriate committees to look into these areas and recommend a legislative package for floor consideration.

To correct immigration policy, we need to take bold action that reforms all aspects of our immigration laws.

Enforcement is only one part of the equation. Sen. Frist and all members of Congress should work together toward a common goal: a humane, fair and secure U.S. immigration system in which our nation, a nation of immigrants, can be proud.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

QUICK TIPS

Community leaders, politicians, business leaders, educators and the media pay a great deal of attention to letters to the editor and other opinion pieces in the newspaper. Letters to the Editor are often written in response to a recent news article or other story printed in a newspaper or magazine. When a letter written by your organization gets printed, it is another chance to get your point across to a large audience. Letters to the editor are usually short, no more than 200 words long.

- † Write it and get it to the paper ASAP, on the day an article appears that invites a response, if possible. Utilize e-mail and faxes to expedite delivery.
- † Make a brief, clear point. Avoid balanced, pro-con essays that give more information than the format requires.
- † You control the message, so say what you most want to say, succinctly.
- † Use sarcasm, catchy phrases, wit, fury, enthusiasm, colorful language. You want to give the editors a well written letter that readers will enjoy and remember.

- † Keep it short. The maximum is 200 words, but the shorter it is, the more likely it will be fit into the paper quickly. Be prepared to trim below 200 words if the editors request it.
- † Letters to the Editor policies and guidelines for length, language and submission are different from paper to paper. Often these are spelled out by the paper or available on their web page. Notice what gets published and craft your letter accordingly.
- † Always mention the title, author and date of the article that sparked your letter.
- † Identify yourself with a one line description (e.g., "The writer is the executive director of the Portland Immigration Coalition.")
- † Include all of your contact information including name, mailing address, e-mail address, phone and fax.
- † The newspaper may ask to edit your letter, but it should not be published without your prior approval if significant edits are made. You don't have to accept their proposed changes, but the price of refusing their edits may be that you are not published.

SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Thursday, June 2, 2005
The Catholic Standard

TO BE CLEAR THINKING OF YOU

By Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick

Every once in a while someone writes me to inquire about something I said or someone said I said. I'm always grateful and at times even a little startled at the interest folks have in listening and wanting to know the truth. I believe that our media here in Washington have really tried to report with faithfulness the positions people take on issues. Sometimes, however, these issues are very complex or emotional and other times, folks like me may not speak as clearly as we should.

One case in point is the question of the Catholic bishops' position on immigration. I think it would be good to use that as an example. Let me bring up just three points which have confused people, and try to set the record straight.

The first is the question of every nation's right to establish rules for the admission of

immigrants into its territory. There is no question about a nation's right to do this. This has always been and continues to be Catholic teaching. We believe that the United States must be able to control its borders and have a clear policy as to who can enter to live and work here. We do believe that such a policy should be humane and generous, as it was in times past when our own families were able to come and start a new life here. We also believe that other countries should help in patrolling their borders so that the flow of illegal immigrants can be controlled.

The second is the question of our United States immigration policy. Because of many reasons, it is now no longer adequate for the task it has to do. President Bush understands that and has proposed changes in it and the Congress on both sides of the political aisle has agreed and presented changes on its own. One example is that a legal immigrant with all the necessary papers and years of working here in this country still cannot legally bring his or her immediate family to the United States without many years of waiting until the quota allows them to be reunited. We believe that families

are the basic strength of all our people and to keep families apart is an injustice and can, indeed, cause all kinds of social and moral problems. Several of the bills in Congress aim at fixing that weakness in our policy, and we support those.

Finally, we do believe in legal immigration. (Realistically, except for the Native Americans, we wouldn't be here today if such a program did not exist when our parents or grandparents or great grandparents came to America.) If migrants who come here to work - often on our farms or in service industries - were not here, our economy would be adversely affected. We need to find a way for them to enter legally. Illegal immigration is a dangerous thing both for our own country and for those who try to immigrate. Hundreds of people die every year trying to cross our borders. They are so often abused by unscrupulous criminal elements. I agree with the Catholic bishops of Arizona that we must find a way to "allow migrant workers and their families to migrate in a safe, orderly and humane manner" that is legal and ultimately helps our own country and our economy.



This is an important issue for America today. We need a strong and clear immigration policy. It must serve our country's security and prosperity and at the same time be based on

the moral values on which all our lives must ultimately rest. We must never forget the Gospel call of Jesus "to welcome the stranger" for in the face of this stranger, we see the face

of Christ. As the bishops try to be clear and consistent in our teaching, I am thinking of you and always anxious that you understand the things I say and why I need to say them.

WRITING AND DISSEMINATING A PRESS RELEASE

Style: Like all other communications to the press, press releases should be catchy and concise. Do not attempt to make all of your arguments in one press release. Instead, stick to your strongest messages and most important points.

Length: Try to keep it short—one page is best. If you do use more than one page, be sure to include your organization's name and the contact person's information on each page. At the bottom of the first page type "(more)" so that the reader knows there is additional information. Multi-page faxes to newsrooms sometimes get separated, which is yet another incentive to keep the release to one page if possible.

Controlling the Message/Messengers: The purpose of the press release is to communicate your organization's perspective or position on the issue, and in writing the press release you have complete control over how you word your argument. You should also be prepared to field follow-up calls from reporters, and have a plan for referring reporters to other sources. People who personify or can add a "human face" to the issue you are pushing for are ideal referrals. For example, in calling for enactment of the DREAM Act or Student Adjustment Act, good messengers would be undocumented immigrant students who have excelled in high school but can't afford to pay international tuition rates and attend a public university. Other good messengers would be high school teachers and guidance counselors, university presidents, and Congressional sponsors of the legislation. Business leaders who have a stake in a well-educated workforce and religious leaders who carry an air of moral authority can be good messengers, as well. These are all people to whom you can and should refer reporters' questions, but it is important to vet these sources to see who would be most

comfortable talking to the media and who can make the most compelling arguments in favor of your position.

Organization:

Title – Be as catchy and enticing as possible; think of this as the headline you want to see in tomorrow's newspaper.

First paragraph – This is your "lead" paragraph. It should include the most pertinent information and what you are calling for.

Body – Allow yourself one to two short paragraphs to briefly explain the issue.

Close – Give your organization's position in the form of a quotation from your spokesperson. Try to use a couple of quotes from your organization's director, and make sure they say exactly what you want to read in tomorrow's newspaper. Remember, this is the only time you will have complete and careful control over exactly what is said by your organization on a particular topic. Many reporters will pull these quotes right from the release and use them in stories, so take your time in crafting them.

Dissemination: Fax and/or email the release to your press list (mailing takes too long). Do not send the release too early, as reporters may lose it. Send the release within one week of when the topic will be relevant news. If you are particularly interested in certain reporters or media outlets carrying your story, call to follow-up on the release. Reporters get so many press releases, it's important to make yours stand out. For broad and immediate distribution, you can make arrangements with a newswire service (like U.S. Newswire at 1.800.544.8995 or P.R. Newswire at 202.547.5155) for them to disseminate your release.

Remember, even if reporters do not use your press release, it's a good way to put your organization on the map so that reporters will call you when they do write about the issue.



JUSTICE FOR IMMIGRANTS *a journey of hope*

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

DATE: October 18, 2005
FROM: David Early
O: 202-541-3200
H: 703-534-4775

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PURSUE SINGLE COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM MEASURE, REJECT HARSH PIECEMEAL APPROACH, BISHOP URGES

WASHINGTON – Congress should pursue comprehensive immigration reform legislation that respects human rights and dignity and reject harshly punitive, piecemeal measures, according to the chairman of the Migration Committee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Bishop Gerald R. Barnes of San Bernardino specifically called on lawmakers to support the *Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act*, introduced in the Senate by Sens. John McCain (R-AZ) and Edward Kennedy (D-MA) and in the House by Reps. Jim Kolbe (R-AZ), Jeff Flake (R-AZ), and Luis Gutierrez (D-IL).

“While we support the right of nations to control their borders, we note that, for much of the last decade, Congress has enacted one harsh, overly-punitive immigration control measure after another, yet the problems in our immigration system have grown during that period,” said Bishop Barnes in a letter to every member of the U.S. House and Senate. “We believe the enactment of comprehensive immigration reforms, such as those that are contained in the *Secure America and Orderly*

Immigration Act of 2005, is the best prescription for an immigration system which is broken and needs repair.”

Bishop Barnes called particular attention to several of the bill’s provisions in keeping with the bishops’ immigration policy priorities, outlined in *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, a pastoral letter issued jointly in 2003 with bishops of Mexico:

- † **Temporary Worker Program:** The bill would establish a program to permit foreign-born workers to enter the United States and work in a safe, orderly, and legal manner. Such a program would help reduce unauthorized migration to our country and also lower the number of deaths of migrants who attempt to cross the desert.
- † **Earned Adjustment:** The bill would allow undocumented workers currently residing in the United States and contributing to our society the opportunity to earn permanent residency over time. Benefits of such a program would be to stabilize the workforce in many important industries, stabilize immi-

grant families, and allow law enforcement to direct resources toward the apprehension and prosecution of smugglers, human traffickers, and terrorists.

- † **Family-based Immigration:** The bill would help to reduce the long waiting times for family reunification for immediate family members, including spouses and children. The USCCB has long argued that family reunification should remain a cornerstone of U.S. immigration policy.
- † **Enforcement:** The bill contains a number of provisions that are designed to improve the ability of the U.S. government to strengthen the enforcement of our nation’s immigration laws without violating basic human dignity.

Bishop Barnes said that while some in Congress have dismissed an earned adjustment program and called for cuts in legal immigration or harsh punitive measures for undocumented immigrants, the USCCB “reject[s] that failed approach, and we urge Congress to reject it, as well.”



JUSTICE FOR IMMIGRANTS *a journey of hope*