

PRESS COVERAGE

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

WHY IS THE MEDIA IMPORTANT?

The media plays an important role in informing and shaping public opinion and setting priorities for our decision-makers. By working successfully with the media, we can generate positive press coverage which will in turn help to create the public and political will to resolve the debt crisis for impoverished countries.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF MEDIA OPPORTUNITIES?

Editorials: This is the official opinion of the newspaper, written by their editorial staff. Editorials are usually placed on the left-hand column of the Opinion section. Editorials are the most powerful opinion piece because it is like an endorsement from the paper itself. Ordinary citizens can contact these writers and influence the editorials that appear in their paper.

Op-Ed: Stands for "opposite the editorial page." This is a concise opinion piece that is authored by a member(s) of the community, not the newspaper staff.

Letters to the editor: These short letters are written by members of the community in response to coverage or opinion pieces in the paper. They are also published in the Opinion section.

Features and other articles: Contact reporters to cover a local event or do a feature story on the debt issue.

TV and radio: You don't have to limit yourself to print media. Local TV and radio stations may also be interested in running a story or interviewing you, particularly if you are able to localize the story with a guest speaker from a debt-burdened country or a local event.

HOW TO GENERATE AN EDITORIAL OR FEATURE STORY IN YOUR LOCAL PAPER:

Do your research. Call the paper to find out who the editorial writers or appropriate reporters are. Read the paper regularly to familiarize yourself with coverage and opinion pieces.

Plan your pitch. Practice a brief pitch to use when you call the editorial writer or reporter. Keep it brief (1-2 minutes) and heartfelt.

Know the typical format of a call. Give a one sentence introduction; ask if they have a few moments right now (they might be on deadline); address the problem and don't assume they are already experts; then talk about a solution; make it local by bringing in the name of your Representative or Senator or activities of your local group.

Ask for an appointment.

- "Can I set up an appointment to tell you more details and give you some information?"
- If yes, arrange to send them information and set up a meeting; if no, ask, "To whom should I speak with at the paper who would be interested in covering this issue?"

End the call with a specific plan to follow up.

Send more info. Drop off, fax or mail some background information. You can get this kind of information from the Jubilee USA national office.

Follow up on the phone within a week. See if they have any questions, and bring new information to their attention.

HOW TO WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

"Letters to the editor are impossible to overuse. We clip them and circulate them through the office like gossip sheets of what's going on. The press represents an overall buzz in the community."

– Congressional Aide

Letters should be short and concise, typically less than 250 words, or about four short paragraphs. Letters should be written with passion, using strong but not strident language.

Once a week, most newspapers will print guidelines on the editorial page for submitting a letter to the editor. Be sure to consult those guidelines before writing a letter to your newspaper.

Tie your letter to a recent article, editorial or column, and you will greatly increase your chances of being published. If you can comment on a specific story in the paper, do so, mentioning the headline and date.

HOW TO GET AN OP-ED PUBLISHED

Newspapers can only publish one to two Op-Eds in each edition, therefore it is harder to get an Op-Ed "placed" than a letter to the editor. Consider asking a member of Congress, religious leader or local celebrity to co-author the piece with you to have a better chance of getting it published.

Op-Eds are longer than letters to the editor, but the guidelines are similar. Start your piece with a provocative statement or a story to draw people into your piece. Tie your Op-Ed to what is going on in the news. There are many different ways to tie-in the debt and World Bank and IMF issues. Be creative, concise and provide good facts to back up your argument.

Call to find out your newspaper's guidelines on submitting Op-Eds. Find out who the Op-Ed editor is. Send in your piece and follow-up with the Op-Ed editor. Keep calling and pitch your piece over the phone. Don't get discouraged if you don't get published on the first try. Ask the editor what you could do differently next time to give you a better chance of being published. Keep trying.

Thank you to RESULTS who contributed to this piece.

www.results.org

More tips on writing Letters to the Editor:

- When emailing, only email to one paper at a time and send your letter in the body of the message, not as an attachment.
- Include your contact information, including a daytime telephone number. The paper will probably want to contact you before printing your letter.
- Mention Jubilee USA Network by name, either in the text or by identifying yourself as a member or supporter below your signature.
- Don't submit the same or similar letters to multiple papers in the same local area.
- Don't submit a letter to a paper that already printed another of your letters in the past month or two.

If your letter is published, send a copy to the Jubilee USA office, so that we can publicize your work and make sure to send a copy to your members of Congress to maximize the impact.

With a little practice, writing good letters to the editor is neither time-consuming nor difficult. No other form of communication can match the impact of a thoughtful letter written by a concerned citizen.

WRITING A PRESS RELEASE

Give a contact name and phone number at the top of your press release and be available.

Pick a short and catchy title!

For Immediate Release: April 21, 2003
For more information: Janet Williams, 303-258-7221

Keep it short preferably one page.

Coloradorans Ring In Freedom from Debt

WHAT: The First Baptist Church and local members of the Jubilee USA Network, will 'Ring-In Freedom from Debt' – celebrating what debt relief is achieving and sounding a call for 100% cancellation of debt, and an end to unreasonable conditions on debt relief for all indebted nations.

WHERE: The bells at Colorado churches, including at First Baptist will ring along with those of churches across the country; in New York, Washington, DC, Seattle, WA, Cleveland, OH, Albuquerque, NM, Ann Arbor, MI and other cities around the US.

WHEN: Saturday and Sunday April 26th and 27th, 2003, as the World Bank and IMF meet in Washington, DC

WHY: Jubilee USA Network is calling on the World Bank and the IMF to provide 100% debt cancellation to impoverished nations for health, education and the fight against HIV/AIDS. As all eyes turn towards our nation's capital for the meeting of these international banks, people of faith are sounding a call for debt cancellation.

"When more than half of all African nations spend more on debt than health care for their citizens, we clearly need to do more to resolve the international debt crisis," said Janet Williams, local Colorado Jubilee activist.

Jubilee USA is opposed to the conditions imposed on countries before they can receive the debt relief – like requiring countries to sell their water supplies, phase out social services or charge impoverished citizens unaffordable fees for health and education. Jubilee USA Network calls for immediate debt cancellation without unreasonable conditions currently required by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

"We are proud to join people of faith and conscience across the country sounding the call for freedom from debt," said Williams.

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Highlight the key facts - what? where? when? who? and why?

highlight any photo opportunities in the press release.

A short quote from one of the organizers is a good way to get your message across.

Use this symbol (the ###) to designate the end of your release.



GETTING MEDIA COVERAGE:

- Telephone the news desk of your local newspaper(s) a week before your event, and send or fax the press release a few days later.
- Phone again once the press release should have arrived and encourage the reporter to come to your event or write a piece on the issue. Try to speak to the appropriate reporter directly, this may be the religion reporter, metro, business/finance or international writer. The key to success is finding a reporter with whom you can build a relationship and interest in the issue. If the reporter you are talking to sounds disinterested, try someone else.
- For TV stations, be sure to call the morning of the event to confirm the event is happening, make sure they have the correct address and to see if a crew is coming to cover the event.
- Don't forget local radio stations. If you are holding an event, you can ask to be interviewed prior to the event to advertise or on the day of the event to publicize. Be available and ready for short interviews. If a national event is happening on our issues, let your local radio stations know that you have a local angle or sell yourself as a local expert that can comment.

PRESS COVERAGE TAKES PATIENCE AND PERSISTENCE

Press work is often frustrating. Reporters can be in a hurry and won't always cover your story or event. Don't give up! Stay in touch with reporters and editorial staff in order to build a relationship over time. Be patient with yourself and **KEEP TRYING**, this is the only way to build your savvy media skills and get good coverage. It takes a lot of work, but the pay-off is great when you see your story in print and know that thousands are hearing about Jubilee and debt.

