

Chapter 4

Letters to the editor

Premise: More newspapers restrict endorsement letters due to orchestrated writing campaigns. The problem must be addressed. But the exchange of ideas remains the lifeblood of editorial pages and the heart of newspapers.

Editors take great pride when they know their newspapers are “making a difference.” A strong barometer is the editorial page, and specifically letters to the editor. The most satisfying editions are those where the editorial page is filled with letters from readers.

It matters little whether the letters address a single topic or multiple issues, whether the letters support or oppose newspapers’ editorial positions. Letters, like editorials, can serve a variety of purposes. They can educate, enlighten or energize readers. They can have readers nodding in agreement or shaking their heads in disgust. In all scenarios, however, they reflect a basic mission of newspapers: To get people to think and share their ideas. Lively editorial pages are a pulse of vital communities.

So why do so many editors stifle the exchange of ideas during the months-long election season? In too many cases, editors arbitrarily accept and reject letters. Yes, decisions typically are based on guidelines. As a general rule, editors say letters that simply repeat the ideas of another writer will not be published. At best, that’s a subjective decision. At worst, it’s telling a lot of local readers that their letters didn’t make the grade, and might well deter them from writing at any time of the year. It leaves a bad taste in their mouths.

Some newspapers even charge for “endorsement” letters to the editor.

Special guidelines should be in force during elections. That can be done, however, in concert with giving as many readers access to the page as possible. The best avenue is to use a sharp editing pencil – or the “delete” button on your keyboard.

The most overriding point is to keep commentary on a level playing field. Inform candidates and readers of the rules up front.

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It's an excellent opportunity for newspapers to state the do's and don'ts in a column early in the campaign season. Circumstances might even warrant a second or third column.

Candidates should have the ability to write letters – with restrictions.

Candidates are rank-and-file readers, too, and should have the ability to write letters. At the same time, it's appropriate to have separate guidelines. Keep in mind that candidates have the ability and opportunity to advance their positions on issues in a variety of avenues – and not just through paid advertising campaigns.

Candidates may routinely issue press releases and participate in forums. Plus, if newspapers are doing their jobs, they will write profiles and do extensive questions-answers on the pertinent issues. And candidates naturally have a cadre of letter-writers who can advance positions on the candidates' behalf.

Policies vary widely among newspapers. Some permit candidates to write one "issues" letter in advance of the primary election and another in advance of the general election. Others let them write almost at will, advancing and responding to issues. Editors should be attentive to the savvy candidates who methodically submit letters as a strategy to supplement or replace paid advertising. In that regard, publishers and editors should be especially sensitive and not overlook the impact on advertising revenue.

Eliminate columns from incumbents during election season.

Many newspapers publish columns from state and federal lawmakers, and local officials, too. These commentaries can help inform readers of important policy decisions and their local impact. The columns can help supplement news coverage of activities at the capitol.

Remember, however, these in essence are commentaries with a purpose. That's why they appear almost always on editorial pages. The columns regularly advance a partisan position. It's no surprise that lawmakers step up the production of these columns during election season.

Look no further than this column which appeared one month prior to the general election. Written by an incumbent Democratic lawmaker, the commentary began: "There are three fundamental

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services of state government that help support a strong business climate: education, efficient transportation and a strong partnership in addressing our health care crisis. Unfortunately, all three of these areas have suffered in the last several years from damaging cuts." And, later in the column, "Underlying all of this is the myth that our current state leadership has solved our state budget deficit without raising taxes."

The clear target was the Republican administration.

For that reason, the columns ought to be eliminated early on in the election season. Logical cutoff points are at the legislative adjournment or the beginning of candidate filings. The columns are an unfair advantage for incumbents. If newspapers choose to publish them, challengers should be given equal opportunity and equal display, complete with a standing logo and mug shot.

Editors should scrutinize these columns for their overall value even when it's not an election season. Most are overwritten and contain more partisan fluff than policy substance. Be selective in publication. Other options are to pare them and publish them as a letter to the editor, or to use the information as part of a news story on a particular issue.

Limit length and frequency of letters.

Space is at a premium during election season. Editors might want to impose more restrictive limits with the goal of still giving everyone the opportunity to weigh in on candidates and issues. Even for newspapers that restrict length, the limit varies greatly, generally from 200 to 450 words. Fairness and consistency should govern.

It's customary at many newspapers to limit authors to one letter per month at any time of year. One standard might be to limit individuals to one letter per ballot question or candidate race. If there's a primary election, that could mean one letter per cycle.

Require facts to support the attacks.

It's unreasonable and impractical for editors to check every piece of information presented as a fact in a letter. Witness the exchange in a courtroom where prosecuting and defense attorneys selectively use the same facts and present them in context favorable to their clients and arguments. Similar dynamics are in play in election campaigns.

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That said, editors can help keep the debate civil. Encourage writers to focus on the issues and provide the appropriate sources for their facts. It's well within newspapers' purview to reject those attack letters that are strictly personal in nature.

Editor Dana Yost at the Marshall (Minn.) *Independent* took the extreme measure of banning all letters in a legislative race – from the candidates and their supporters – because the exchange got out of hand. “This is no light call,” the editor wrote. “We often encourage public debate, especially about races and issues important to southwest Minnesota, and we take our role as a public information source seriously. But on this race, the public discourse is no longer productive or constructive – and thus the ban.”

Set ground rules for rebuttals.

Election season invariably produces letter-writing volleys among candidates and their supporters. Addressing the issue early on will help thwart some of the complaints during the heat of the season, such as when campaigns charge newspapers with making arbitrary decisions of which letters to publish and which to withhold. A good rule of thumb is to allow each individual two letters. In other words, each has an opportunity for a rebuttal after the initial exchange. Someone inevitably will cry foul – that the other person has had the final say – but that always will be the case. Let each side get two shots, and then recommend they pick up the telephone and continue their exchange privately.

Don't be afraid of having reasonable ground rules; it is in the best interests of readers. Editors regularly preach to reporters the virtues of writing shorter. The same principle holds true for letters. Readers grow tired of lengthy letters on the same subjects and editorial pages dominated by the same writers, and they eventually will ignore the page. A short letter to the point has greater impact than a rambling letter repetitive in its message.

State deadlines, including a separate deadline for letters that raise new issues.

Deadlines are necessary to allow ample opportunity to debate the issues. Facilitating that exchange is more challenging for nondaily newspapers as fewer editions are available.

It's pretty easy to pick a date when the final letters will be accepted. The chief concern, given the expected late rush of letters,

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is to have it early enough so there's room to publish all those that meet newspaper guidelines. The deadline also should accommodate letters that address issues raised late in the campaign. A deadline of a week prior to Election Day probably is suitable. For nondailies, those dates necessarily must be moved up.

The more important deadline is for letters that raise new issues that might warrant a response from the other side. Eleventh-hour charges fall into two camps, each prompting a different handling:

Some letters are strategically lobbed in the final days; the information is known well in advance but surfaces late with the hope that it might deliver a knockout punch. Editors are well within their bounds to reject this type of letter altogether – even if the point might have proved legitimate had the letter arrived earlier.

In rare cases, however, letters might raise or address an issue that truly just came to light and warrants public attention. In the worst-case scenario, a letter might arrive with only one edition prior to the election. Editors have a couple of options in this case:

One avenue is to do a news story. The reporter can contact all the parties involved, noting the circumstances of how the issue was raised.

Or the newspaper might decide to publish the letter, but let the “opponent” see the letter in advance and write a response. Both letters would be published alongside each other with an explanatory editor's note. The “other side” may not want to respond, but the offer should be extended.

Editors can be subjective in deciding whether to publish these letters. At the core is whether the newspaper has time to do justice with the information, despite how compelling it might be.

Editors' best defense is their offense: Publish the letters policy early and often, so writers cannot complain – with any basis – that they weren't aware of deadlines. Then stick to the deadlines. If 5 p.m. is the cutoff, check with the front desk when the hour strikes. Clear the fax machine and e-mails. And then be prepared for the creative challenges – that the newspaper's clock must be five minutes faster or that an errand took longer than expected to make the delivery tardy. The excuses are most amusing when they come from veteran managers who have coordinated letter campaigns for years.

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☑ Don't let candidates use the letters column to respond to issues raised in paid advertising.

The letters column is routinely used to respond to issues raised in stories and editorials.

But should letters be the forum to react to ads? Exceptions might arise, but as a general rule, newspapers should be careful about this practice. The best guideline is that candidates respond to the message in the same avenue as the original message. Candidates should respond to paid ads with paid ads. Campaigns are right to be upset if their paid ads are rebutted on a regular basis in the free letters column.

Don't forget that the advertising department has an interest in this policy. Soliciting advertising dollars becomes increasingly difficult if candidates know they'll get plenty of coverage in the news columns. Don't give candidates any more freebies.

☑ Some issues raised in letters are more appropriately pursued as news stories.

No matter how exhaustive the news coverage, a story will occasionally get overlooked. And campaigns will be quick to raise that issue in letters. Editors must decide whether to let the issue be explored and debated in the letters column, or whether it warrants pursuit by the news staff.

There's no right or wrong way to handle such situations. Editors might nix the letter completely and write a story. If that's done, the story should reference who raised the issue.

Aggressive campaigns will readily feed ideas, and some might well rise to the level of a story. But editors should avoid the trap of reacting to every suggestion. Stories should pass muster of being worthy of broad discussion and warrant spending staff resources during a busy election season.

A couple of examples are instructive: A letter raising a candidate's criminal background automatically should be turned over to the news staff. On the other hand, campaigns frequently charge their opponents with "flip-flopping" on issues and include a long list of votes taken by the incumbent. Unless it's a particularly over-riding issue, the debate is probably best left to the letters.

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☑ Decide criteria for publishing letters by individuals outside the normal readership area. Consider that the individuals still may be constituents affected by a race, such as in congressional districts that cover multiple counties.

Campaigns have reached a new level of sophistication. Letters are orchestrated to the point that the headquarters selects individuals to write on specific issues and target specific audiences. Campaigns might go a step further by mailing the letters from a central office, or at least directing individuals when to mail them, so there is a steady flow to particular newspapers.

Such practices only will intensify. And it is worsening with the Internet.

Some letters should immediately sound an alarm and be tossed in the circular file. Consider a letter sent via e-mail in support of a congressional candidate. The template was written in one font and type size with spaces conveniently left to localize the letter. Under ordinary circumstances, the letter might make it past the first wave of the gatekeeper. But this writer inserted the “local” information in a different font and type size – a clear example of a letter intended for mass distribution. Such letters should be rejected out of hand, and editors should feel no obligation to notify the authors.

Editorial pages, at their foundation, should be a forum for the exchange of local opinions. On that basis, editors are on solid ground to restrict their pages to letters from local readers – even in statewide or regional races. Priority should be given to local constituents and not those of voters from another corner of a region or state.

Editors invariably will be challenged with letters that tempt them to consider bending the rules. The best example might be a letter from someone who has expertise on a local issue. Consider debate on energy policy by a state legislature – specifically, whether nuclear power plants should be allowed to store the radioactive waste on-site. The decision immediately becomes part of a national debate over the long-term viability of nuclear power, prompting letters and commentaries from national experts on both sides of the issue.

Exceptions should be few and far between. Remember, once the door is opened, editors can expect a flood of letters. There’s a distinction between letting “outside” experts weigh in on a local

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issue, and accepting letters regularly distributed on issues debated across the country. Debates on gay marriage amendments or gun control, for example, are commonplace, with letters often originating from points nationwide. Lobbyists and public relations firms earn their money by placing letters for their clients.

Rarely do editors complain about a lack of letters during election season; it's usually the opposite. That might be the best reason to stick to local letter writers.

Verify all letters, preferably by a phone call.

Newspapers should make it standard practice not to publish any letters lacking full identification for purposes of verification – name, complete address and phone number. Someone at the newspaper should be responsible for calling all writers and confirming authorship.

For letters advanced via e-mail, be certain that the e-mail address is that of the writer and not someone else. In addition, pay attention to those letters that all originate from the same fax machine.

Many may ask whether it's really worth the effort to confirm all letters. The reality is that many letters, though sent in by individuals, contain the ideas, maybe even the words, supplied by someone else.

The process is time consuming, but worthwhile and necessary. It alerts readers that the newspaper takes the issue seriously. And it can, on occasion, cause repercussions in campaigns. Consider this case: A call was made to confirm a letter. The writer was savvy to the process of coordinated letter-writing campaigns and had participated in them previously. But even he was angry this time. Campaign headquarters had asked him to write a letter and said it would forward possible points to be made. Instead, the office sent the letter and forged his signature. We rejected the letter, and the author let the campaign headquarters know of his displeasure.

We followed up with a column to readers: "Nice try, but we're not entirely stupid." The epistle admittedly didn't stop the flow of orchestrated letters altogether, but it put campaigns on notice that we were aware of their charades.

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Be flexible on guidelines, depending on whether letters appear in the print edition or on-line.

Chat lines are standard fare on many newspaper Web sites, and they have growing prominence during elections. Web sites expand the opportunity for commentary since there are no space constraints and the exchange can be spontaneous. That's an especially important ingredient for weekly newspapers.

Editors must guard against such things as libel, whether letters appear in print editions or on the Web. Beyond that, however, different standards may apply to on-line comments. Web sites generally feature more free-flowing, unedited exchanges.

Be sensitive to the display of letters.

A 15-inch letter to the editor was submitted on behalf of Candidate A, a Republican, seeking a legislative seat. The letter was the anchor element on that day's editorial page and was displayed with a four-column headline at the top of the page. The same page carried a three-inch letter in support of Candidate B, a Democrat, seeking the same seat. The letter appeared at the bottom of the page.

From the editor's perspective, the layout followed standard design principles, with the longer elements getting the larger headlines. Campaign staff for Candidate B disagreed and complained strongly that the newspaper – the *Republican Eagle* – once again showed its political colors. Newspapers always will be questioned on news coverage of campaigns, but remember that letters have become an important component of campaigns and will receive equal scrutiny.

Try to group letters for candidates under a single headline and subheads, especially if several letters are on behalf of one candidate. For example, in a city council race, the overall headline might read, "Candidate A supports downtown development" in a multiple-column headline. Then place all letters under the headline, each with a brief subhead to distinguish its focus. For example, "Supports tax incentives" or "Advocates more parking." This layout is especially effective when dealing with the final barrage of comments. Letters become repetitive, and editors can pare them to their essence. Letter-writing campaigns will receive similar treatment, and the format will be reader friendly.

In similar fashion, try to publish letters from similar races on

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the same page. For example, if there are pro/con letters on the same race, if feasible, publish all the comments on a particular race – city council, school board, legislature, governor - in the same edition. Candidates will see this as fair treatment. Readers also will be able to evaluate the effectiveness of the arguments by reading opposing comments side by side rather than in two different editions. It's the same rationale for publishing initial candidate profiles in the same edition.

Photos and other graphics are a great way to break up a page of text. Again, be consistent. If Candidate A, or a campaign manager, is given an opportunity to detail positions on priority issues – complete with a mug – then be certain Candidate B has the same opportunity. If a graphic, such as an outline of a legislative district, is inserted within a letter, be on notice that a similar element probably should be used with a letter from the opponent's campaign. Such details might seem like nitpicking, but all the elements are important to the campaigns. Fairness and consistency should be the standards.

☑ Make readers aware that election letters will be edited aggressively, especially as the election nears and letters repeat themes.

Readers want to know who is supporting a particular candidate or initiative, and the reasons. Editors should focus on the “who” and “why” in editing letters, especially as the election nears and writers repeat themes.

Certain phrases are superfluous and common to many letters. They take up precious space in letters columns. For example:

“Readers face a most important decision this election.” “I’ve had the privilege of knowing and working with this individual.” “Please join me in voting for this candidate.” “This candidate will best represent your interests.” “Remember, on Election Day, join me in voting for this candidate.” “My candidate is of the highest principles.” “This candidate is one of the most caring and knowledgeable people you’ll meet.”

While we’re at it, let’s simply insert the Boy Scout law in all letters. “My candidate is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent.” That should cover all the bases.

Hardly a campaign season passes without all candidates being

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identified in letters as “hardworking, honest, supportive of family and putting their constituents’ interests first.” In truth, the first and last paragraphs of most endorsement letters can be eliminated. Responsible and aggressive editing still leaves the message intact.

Identify authors where appropriate.

Comments from rank-and-file citizens represent the majority of election letters. They are published in standard format with the writer’s name and hometown.

Some circumstances dictate, however, that newspapers identify authors by position or relationship to a candidate. School district business managers write why it’s in the best interests to vote “yes” on a school levy referendum. Campaign managers respond to criticism leveled toward their candidates. Family members write on behalf of candidates. In many cases, an individual’s expertise on an issue or relationship to a candidate should be identified within the letter.

Editors should feel at liberty to add a tagline to identify the obvious relationships – such as a campaign manager or a spouse – as it offers insight to the perspective. At the same time, newspapers should be careful not to overstep their bounds. Letters from relatives are a case in point. It’s not unusual, especially in local contests, to receive letters from an array of relatives, whether grandparents, aunts or uncles, or siblings. Some will say all of these individuals should be identified for their personal relationships. That’s an unrealistic demand, as editors, even in the smallest of communities, will not know all the relationships.

Letter-writing campaigns are here to stay. Still, editors must put campaigns on alert. Following is a column I wrote after verifying that a letter was a fake:

Column: Nice try, but we’re not entirely stupid

Two letters arrived in the mail last week, both criticizing 2nd District congressional candidate Alex Radke for his stance on privatization of Social Security.

The unpublished letter was a fake, including the signature.

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The R-E confirms signed comments prior to publication, whether they appear in the letters section or in People's Platform. The misrepresentation of this letter was clear from the moment we called the supposed author.

"My letter?" he asked with wonder in his voice. He was not only surprised but was upset with the campaign worker who had solicited him to write on behalf of Democrat Eric Ladwig.

"I thought they were going to send it to me first," he said. In fact, he was under the impression that he would be sent a list of suggested points but that he would write the letter himself.

"It must be a form letter," he said, adding that he would not have any letter published with his name that he hadn't seen. "Don't print it," he said.

Not the first time

Letter-writing campaigns are very much part of campaign strategies today. Candidates see it as a way to supplement paid advertising. The flow of letters churned out by party machines has become so excessive that many newspapers have stopped publishing endorsement letters altogether or at least severely restrict them.

The R-E throughout the years has maintained a liberal letters policy, even during election season. We do limit the number of letters an individual can write, but we rarely restrict length.

We're not so naive as to believe that we recognize all the orchestrated campaigns, but we believe it's important to let local residents express their opinions on local issues and candidates.

But this latest letter crossed the line. We had our suspicions before we made the telephone call to confirm. Both letters arrived the same day, and both bore other telltale signs.

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The individual said he was going to call the Ladwig cam-

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paign to express his displeasure.

As he alerts that campaign, we alert all candidates: Effective immediately, we will reject any letter that has even the appearance of an orchestrated campaign.

The same local party machine behind the letter last week has engaged in similar practices in previous elections. We know the source but won't identify it in this column. Let's just say this is a warning.

Other previous incidents of campaigners trying to dupe the editor include:

A candidate brought in a letter on his behalf, unaware that the same letter had been faxed to our office earlier in the day.

The R-E was challenged on whether a letter met the deadline for publication – challenged not by the author but by another individual who oversaw the campaign.

The party machines have become lazy. The same dozen or so core names are used each year to write letters for the favored candidates – whether for a local, state or federal race.

Critical readers

What does this mean?

It's unfortunate, but from here on certain "legitimate" letters likely are not to be published. If there's any hint that a letter is part of an organized effort, it will wind up in the trash.

The parties are welcome to deliver their messages in paid advertising.

We appreciate the fact that political parties and special-interest groups will continue letter campaigns – albeit with some additional inconveniences.

The most important lesson, however, is that readers need to critically evaluate all letters – especially during election season. For it's increasingly clear that even if a letter is legitimate, there's reasonable doubt whether the ideas are original.

As for last week's hoax, we recommend the real author step forward. As it stands, the letter is an embarrassment to the campaign and to the party.

'Paid' letters raise many questions

A publisher of a Minnesota weekly, the *Proctor Journal*, generated his own national headlines in 2006 when he started charging 5 cents a word for letters to the editor that endorse a candidate. He was frustrated with the orchestrated letter-writing that has become standard fare among local, state and national campaigns.

Still, the idea of "paid" letters is troubling and most likely unthinkable at most newspapers. And for good reason. The practice is in conflict with newspapers' strident defense of the Fourth Estate that everyone is entitled to an opinion. At the same time, candidates have only themselves to blame for these policies, due to the commonplace and deliberate efforts to not only get individuals to write letters on candidates' behalf, but also to direct what they write and to which newspapers.

"After years of having candidates drop by the office, news release in hand but no ads, I just got tired of spending space and time and not getting any sort of advertising and then getting barraged with last-minute letters to the editor supporting issues and candidates," said Jake Benson of the *Proctor Journal*, whose 100-year-old weekly newspaper has a circulation of about 1,950.

Benson was not the first publisher to implement a policy of paid political letters. An Idaho publisher generated attention when he made the same decision in 1988.

Paid political letters certainly are in the minority, but the idea poses food for thought.

Consider this situation: A Canadian newspaper banned letters during the final week of the election season after getting a disturbing call from a reader. Editor Greg Mulock of *The Northern Light* in Bathurst, New Brunswick, said the reader told him that he had been asked by a local political party, and one of the candidates, to write a letter endorsing the candidate in exchange for financial compensation.

The intensity and frequency of letter-writing campaigns pick up during election season as candidates look to such letters to stretch their treasuries. Why pay for an advertisement when faithful followers can write a letter, extolling the attributes of particular candidates?

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Charging for letters is a slippery slope, however. Beyond the ethical questions, editors and publishers will be hard pressed to set guidelines, and stick to them, to differentiate those that qualify as “free” letters and those that require writers to “ante” up to get their views published.

A common standard among newspapers that have implemented the policy is whether a letter simply endorses a candidate or whether it addresses issues. In fact, due to the deluge of election letters, that’s becoming a litmus test among newspapers for printing any endorsement letters – free or paid.

It’s an admirable threshold in theory. Every newspaper relishes editorial pages devoted to robust discussion of substantive issues. But editors need to make sure this policy is being followed fairly and consistently.

Editors are certain to be challenged on their decisions from candidates and readers alike – unless the paid letters are purely nondescript, such as: “I support Mary Hanson,” or “Joe Smith will get my vote.” The reality is that many local contests are void of issues – are you going to charge letter writers in those cases?

Newspapers also should not forget the significance of the writers. Their identities may well be the “issue.” For example, a retiring lawmaker endorses the candidate from the opposing party. A proponent of a strong downtown supports the owner of a strip-mall development for city council. A city father endorses a relative newcomer for the school board.

Two reasons cited for implementing paid letters are because they lack substance or because the free letters are replacing paid ads. If those truly are the reasons, many newspapers better rethink what kind of letters they accept year-round.

How many opinion pages are filled with “thank you” letters following a successful bloodmobile visit, Salvation Army or United Way campaign, or a church fundraiser? How many newspapers also accept letters publicizing these events, even though they have been promoted in news stories? The examples are limitless.

No one questions the worthiness of these events. But where’s the substance in a “free” letter signed by organizers of the Red Kettle campaign thanking all donors vs. the substance of a “paid” letter encouraging fellow residents to elect an indi-

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vidual as the town's next mayor?

The reality is that vibrant editorial pages are often a target of organized campaigns. Downtown revitalization projects, arena proposals and riverfront developments are among numerous issues that prompt letters. Some individuals weigh in simply because they are interested. Others are clearly part of campaigns, even identifying themselves as members of a particular group formed to support or oppose the proposal.

Newspapers have plenty of opportunity to lay down the ground rules and govern the debate. Letters should be edited for substance and redundancy. It takes time, but the extra effort will keep the page fresh and make room for numerous voices.

At the same time, newspapers should identify and seize opportunities to pitch the respective groups for a parallel advertising campaign.

It's a dangerous path when editors start restricting access to editorial pages simply on the basis of supporting a candidate for elective office – the very heart of the democratic process. Editorial pages, at their core, are intended to foster debate.

"We get six to 10 letters a week endorsing people, and mostly they are from people from outside the area," said Benson at the *Proctor Journal*. "We just got tired of people not taking out the ads" but wanting their free letters to run.

Benson's irritation was understandable, but it also could have been handled by a guideline that is routine at many newspapers – to accept letters only from within newspapers' readership areas.

At the same time, Benson spoke to an issue which faces all editors. "They know where we are when it comes to free publicity, but when they have to advertise, they seem to go to the electronic media."

In the end, the burden of getting candidates to spend money on ads vs. trying to supplement limited funds with free letters rests with the newspapers. That point may appear harsh, and it is made without any reflection on the newspapers identified here that charge for endorsement letters. It's a reminder that election coverage is a tandem responsibility between news and advertising departments. Coordinating efforts is the key to solid coverage and increased revenue for the newspaper.