

EDITORIAL

Exercise your *WRITE* to freedom of speech

In an election year more than at any other time newspapers in the United States serve a two-fold purpose. First, they inform citizens about expressed opinions of candidates. Second, they inform candidates about expressed opinions of citizens.

The second function is the more valuable by far. While candidates may have their personal opinions, most are politicians; as such, their expressed opinions reflect (they hope) those of the majority of voters. In this way, each candidate aspires to garner enough votes to win an election.

Citizens, conversely, hold opinions about positions held, past performances, or future actions proposed by candidates. For every vociferous voter who favors a particular candidate rather than his opponent, an equally persuasive constituent holds the opposite view. Between these two people stand the true, the real, the actual Silent Majority.

The Silent Majority is composed of an enormous number of people who have not yet reached a conclusion. They don't know who they want to see become the next president of the United States. And they don't know who they want elected senator, representative, or even selectman. The Silent Majority may not make up their collective minds at all. It is conceivable that, once more, a minority will determine who wins or loses political races. That need not be the case. The Silent Majority can be stimulated.

Newspapers offer a forum where citizens are given the

opportunity to share their opinions and to air reasons for them. Every newspaper runs a LETTERS column. Any citizen is invited to contribute. Surveys show the LETTERS column is one of the most widely-read section of any newspaper. Your published letter carries a double punch because it can influence not only other voters like yourself, (some of whom will undoubtedly be members of the Silent Majority), but will be read by elected officials.

If you believe your viewpoint is valid, write your newspaper. If your letter is printed, it may crystallize someone else's ideas or clarify a muddled notion or help an indecisive person reach a reasoned conclusion. Your opinion, clearly expressed, may influence several other voters and might change how a politician stands, as well.

Newspaper editors have no hard and fast rules about letters they print although, because brevity and controversial subjects attract the most readers, letters with fewer than 200 words written on just one subject are preferred. Whether you write about a local issue or one of wider scope, mentioning a relevant event or current trend makes your comment timely. Send the original of your letter, not a photocopy.

Your letter will probably not be printed unless it is signed and includes an address and phone number so the paper can verify you did write and sent it (and that someone else did not use your name). If you desire anonymity, chances that your letter will be published are diminished. Your position, if

worth publicizing, is worth standing behind, so be prepared for some friendly public comment if you express yourself freely on a controversial subject.

If your letter is published and you want to be sure it makes a political impression, send a copy to your legislator. You may find yourself pleasantly surprised to discover your letter has considerable impact. It may generate letters in response because a published letter to the editor is a far stronger statement than a telephone call. Write to your editor; exercise your right to freedom of speech and utilize freedom of the press.