



... **GENERAL / COMMUNICATIONS**

How to Talk to Reporters

BY DAVID ROSTCHECK

I am frequently asked how to talk to the press and have your libertarian point of view accurately reported. Popular opinion notwithstanding, you can do this, but you need careful preparation and discipline.

The key skill in talking to reporters is to *only say what you want them to print*. There is no "off the record" -- even a well-intentioned reporter can misunderstand you or confuse something.

Plan out the key points you want to convey, and think about what to say for each. Write each down as a sentence and reduce it to its essence. Prepare yourself to say it, and to shape your responses to include your points.

Don't "chat" with reporters -- keep your conversation focused and professional, as if you were on camera. Offer to e-mail the reporter your quotes, so they get them exactly.

They might try to trip you up -- for example, to present another libertarian's apparently radical statement and try to get you to criticize it, or to pose an inflammatory dilemma where all answers sound bad. If so, say, "I wouldn't really want to comment without knowing more about it."

Know how long a quote from you they

Reporters from newspapers work under incredible time pressure. Understand and respect their demanding job. They have deadlines in the afternoon, so call in the morning if possible. Make covering you as easy as possible. Be reachable, be concise, and be clear.

Realize that the editor may seriously alter a reporter's story.

Newspapers like photos, so always have digital photos ready to go. When being photographed by press, always mind the angle and background and wear a friendly smile.

Reporters are not usually bad people and many of them, especially at local or regional papers, try very hard to be fair.

Don't be afraid to talk to the press. But always remember that talking to reporters is like taming lions. You may like your job. You may like the lion. But it's still a lion, and if you're not paying attention you can lose an arm. So stay alert around the press and keep all your fingers!

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will use, and don't give them too much material. A newspaper article will, at most, quote you for a few sentences. An in-depth interview may do more -- but media neophytes often become horrified when their 30-minute conversation yields one sentence in print, and it's not what they meant to say. Play it safe and say only what you mean.

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