

WORK WITH THE MEDIA TO AMPLIFY YOUR MESSAGE



The media is a free platform to get your message to many more people than you might be able to reach alone. Why else should we work to get media attention? To:

- *Pressure your targets*
- *Educate the general public about the issue of the national debt*
- *Spread the word and recruit volunteers to your cause*

Successful Strategies for Working with the Media

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE PRESS

With a little research you can often find out which reporters are writing about economic or community news where you live. Just Google your city, town, or region, and words like “economy,” or “debt”, and see who is writing or broadcasting the stories. Call the general number for the outlet and ask for that reporter. When you talk with a reporter, remember to act friendly, give them a short pitch on your story, and tell them you’ll keep in touch. Try asking them for a meeting to give them a heads up on the campaign, and what you’re planning to do.

STAY ON MESSAGE

A “talking point” is a phrase or sentence that helps succinctly explain your message for the media. It’s critical to stay focused on conveying your 1-3 top talking points, and is definitely worth writing out what these will be for your group, and even practicing them together. This may sound simple, but it can be all too easy to get distracted by a question and begin talking about something else that you may know a lot about, but that isn’t the main point you want to convey. Even if your interviewer asks you about something tangential, find a way to divert the conversation back to your main points.

Sample Talking Points

- *The campaign to Fix the Debt is a non-partisan campaign to put America on a better fiscal and economic path, and avert the potentially disastrous consequences of a growing federal debt.*
- *Policymakers must acknowledge that our growing debt is a serious threat to the security and economy of the United States, and make it their urgent priority to put a plan in place to stabilize the debt as a share of the economy, and move it towards a downward path.*
- *A successful plan must be bipartisan to succeed politically and financially, and include reforms to all areas of the budget. It must reform Medicare and Medicaid, strengthen Social Security, and include comprehensive and pro-growth tax reform, which broadens the base, lowers rates, raises revenues, and reduces the deficit.*
- *The recommendations of the Simpson-Bowles Commission and other recent bipartisan efforts, which saved at least \$4 trillion and addressed all parts of the budget, provide effective frameworks for such a plan.*
- *The plan should be conducive to long-term economic growth, protect the vulnerable, include credible enforcement mechanisms to ensure that debt reduction is achieved, and leave the next generation with a positive economic future.*
- *Today, debt stands at more than 70 percent of our economy (or \$11.1 trillion), but is set to continue to rise even after the economy recovers from the recent downturn. The debt is on track to exceed 100 percent of the economy next decade, exceed 200 percent by the 2040s, and reach even further unprecedented heights after that.*
- *Ultimately, we will face some type of economic crisis if we don't change course – perhaps along the lines of what several European countries have been experiencing over the past few years.*
- *A credible debt reduction plan that is well received by markets and our creditors could actually help strengthen the recovery right now by improving confidence and reducing uncertainty, even though savings might not start until after the economy recovers.*

DEVELOP SPOKESPEOPLE

Staying on message, and telling a powerful story isn't always easy, which is why it can be helpful to designate one or a few people in your group as spokespeople who feel confident taking on that role. Think in your group (or your allies) who has a really powerful personal story about why they care about the national debt, and who would be really articulate in front of a camera or speaking to a reporter. Work with this person (or multiple people) to develop their story, and to practice sticking to their main talking points. You may want to hone these skills with everyone on your team, as you never know when the media will pop a question to anyone at an event.

RECRUIT MESSENGERS

The national Fix the Debt has recruited several high profile messengers and asked them for key quotes about the issue. Feel free to use these quotes in your press work, or reach out to influential local leaders who might be willing to offer a quote in support.

Quotes from Key Messengers

- **Erskine Bowles, Co-Founder, The Campaign to Fix the Debt:** “We need our leaders to make these hard choices, these politically difficult choices. I’m confident that if this campaign succeeds in getting politicians to put partisanship aside and pull together, rather than pull apart, then the future of this country is very, very bright. But I’m equally sure that if we continue to kick the can down the road, duck the tough choices, shirk our responsibilities, then America is well on its way to becoming a second rate power.”
- **Senator Al Simpson, Co-Founder, The Campaign to Fix the Debt:** “I am highly gratified that such a distinguished group of former public officials, business leaders and so many others are joining Erskine and me to launch a Campaign to Fix the Debt. Legislators in Washington need to hear – before the election – from the constituents they represent on this critical issue. The voters are way ahead of their elected representatives in realizing we need to honestly ‘do something’ about this problem and that fixing it will require that everyone accept some sacrifices in the things they may like for the good of the country they love. The American public is thirsting for the truth and bold leadership from their elected representatives. This campaign will greatly help to ensure that their voices are finally really being heard – plenty loud and clear – where it counts – in Congress and Washington, D.C.”
- **Senator Judd Gregg, Co-Chairman, The Campaign to Fix the Debt:** “Without significant, fundamental and comprehensive reforms, the debt will reach 90 percent of the economy within 10 years and exceed 250 percent by the early 2040s. These crippling levels of debt threaten the strength of our economy, our standard of living, and the prosperity of future generations.”
- **Governor Ed Rendell, Co-Chairman, The Campaign to Fix the Debt:** “We simply cannot afford all the promises we’ve made, but, if we do this right, we can make reforms in a way that protects the most vulnerable, prioritizes important investments in areas like infrastructure and education, and enhances economic growth.”
- Find more quotes at www.fixthedebt.org.

Tools for Working With the Media

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A Letter to the Editor (LTE) is a short response to a recent article, and is often an easy way to get your opinions in print. Here are a few tips to getting your LTE published:

- *Be prompt.* If you see a relevant article to the debt in your local paper, get started on your LTE that day. Editors are likely to run LTE's shortly after an article has run, before it fades, so act fast.
- *Make the connection.* Connect your letter to an issue recently included in the publication to which you are writing.
- *Keep it short.* The first sentence should summarize your argument (and should maybe even aim to sound a little controversial to capture people's attention). Then you can build a slightly longer argument behind it, but otherwise, editors will skip over your letter.
- *Follow the rules.* Check the publications guidelines for submitting LTE's, and make sure to adhere to their length and any other rules. E-mail your LTE to make sure it gets in quickly, and include it in the body of the e-mail.
- *Follow up.* Give a call to the outlet a day later to make sure they received it, and to ask if they'll be printing it.

Sample Letter to the Editor

Your contact information

Date

Dear Editor (or writer of the article),

I appreciated Mr. Johnson's analysis of the presidential candidates in his weekly column, but feel he omitted their stance on a crucial issue: the national debt. As a country, America's gross debt is more than \$16 trillion and we continue to borrow each day. That's \$33,500 worth of debt per person in the U.S. And even more frightening, by 2035, that number is projected to grow to about \$125,000 per person in today's dollars.

As a recent college graduate, I experienced a bit of shock entering the professional world with so many daunting challenges facing our country, including jobs, education, infrastructure, climate change and health care. Until now, none of these issues seemed to directly impact my daily life, but I quickly realized that our future health, happiness and prosperity depends on addressing them.

Without action, our out-of-control national debt will starve our nation of the resources it needs to find solutions to all the other problems. Something must be done today to put our national debt on a more sustainable trajectory. To enact change we all need to become involved in our democratic process and let our voices be heard. My first step has been signing the Citizen's Petition to Fix the Debt -- a grassroots petition that will demonstrate to Washington that solving our national debt crisis is a top priority for Americans regardless of age, location or political affiliation. I hope others in our town, and in our state, will consider joining me in taking on this incredibly important issue.

Sincerely,

YOUR NAME

[Include a byline if you choose, a one line statement about who you are.]

RADIO INTERVIEWS

The radio is a sometimes forgotten, but often listened-to, medium not to be ignored by the successful organizer. Local radio hosts, especially on public radio, are often looking for people to interview. Reach out to build relationships with hosts on popular or public stations, let them know about the issue and what you're planning, and ask if they'd be willing to interview you (or your best spokesperson from your group) on the air. Make sure to remember: develop your talking points, and stay on message!

GET THE MEDIA TO COVER AN EVENT OR ACTION

One of the key ways to make sure your actions have an impact is to get the media to cover them. To do so, there are some simple tips to follow.

- **Plan something creative**
The most important way to ensure getting covered is to be newsworthy. Think about what would make your campaign unique and interesting to cover, something like "the first march to stop the debt", or some other superlative that will catch the media's attention. If you do good work in setting up a great event and campaign, getting reporters to cover your work won't be as tough!
- **Create a press list**
Ideally you've already built some relationships with reporters in your area, but regardless, sit down and create a list of the most important media outlets in your area, from print news to TV to radio to bloggers.

- **Send out a press advisory**
Before your event, you'll want to write a media advisory (different from a press release), which is basically an invitation to the press to attend your event. It includes the 5 W's (who, what, where, when, why), highlighting the most exciting elements of your event (and why they would want to cover it). You'll find a sample advisory below. Send in the body of your email (not as an attachment).
- **Make "pitch calls"**
Once you've sent out your advisories, wait a day and follow up by phone. When you call the news outlet, ask for the person to whom you sent your advisory. Give them a short, 30 second pitch that you've prepared about your event, and ask them if they received the advisory about it. Don't forget to ask: will they be able to attend? If not, could they send someone else? Be persistent, but not too pushy.
- **Send out your press release**
A press release is different from a media advisory in that it tells the entire story and context of your event in the past tense; it is essentially what you would write if you were writing the news article you would most want to see published (we've prepared a sample below for you to modify). Write as much of this as you can ahead of time, and be sure to modify key details like numbers in attendance, appearances by special guests, and anything else noteworthy that happens at the event. Send in the body of your email to your media contacts, and give them a follow up call to make sure they received it, and to ask when they'll run the story.

Sample Pitch Call Script: How to Call the Media & Ask Them to Cover Your Event

Once you've sent out your press advisory, now it's time to follow up. When you call, you'll want to ask them if they've received the advisory, and

Hello! Is _____ available?

Hi! My name is (FIRST and LAST)_____ and I am a volunteer with _____ (event/ group name).

I'm calling to introduce myself and to let you know about an exciting local event (describe your event briefly) coming up that is part of a national campaign to call for urgent solutions to the national debt crisis. Do you have a minute or are you on deadline?

(If on deadline, set up a time to call back, if not, continue!)

Did you receive the advisory I sent you?

(If yes.) Great!

(If no) Can I confirm your email so I can get that to you?

I thought you might be interested in this because _____ (you wrote a story on a similar topic/you're the economy reporter for your paper/you often cover community events and issues) Our event will be the first/biggest/ most unusual _____ in our town's history. (i.e., give your hook for your local event in one-two sentences! Also mention your favorite event highlight, i.e. 500 people in front of your congressman's office, faith leaders from multiple faiths, etc.)

Can you make it?

IF YES or MAYBE: Great! (Give info and follow up.)

IF NO: Is there someone else you think would be interested at _____ (name of their publication)

Thanks so much for your time!

YOUR NAME

[Include a byline if you choose, a one line statement about who you are.]

Sample Media Timeline

- 2-3 weeks out: Make sure your event is listed in every community calendar around, including newspapers, blogs, radio shows, organizational websites, and yes, even real bulletin boards.
- 5-10 days before: Send your media advisory by email, and include key information on expected visuals, spokespeople, and anything else unique about your event.
- 1-3 days before: Follow up with a phone call to pitch the story and make sure the reporter received the advisory.
- 1 day before: Re-send media advisory and follow up with a phone call to confirm their attendance.
- Day of: Call one more time to make sure they're attending and know all the details they need to.
- Next day: Send your press release!

Sample Media Advisory

Key tips to remember about media advisories:

- *Include the 5 W's: who, what, where when why about your event*
- *Include your contact information*
- *Put a short description of your campaign at the bottom of the advisory*
- *Include the most exciting details like visuals or speakers at your event*

Sample Media Advisory

For Immediate Release

9/1/12

Contact: YOUR NAME, YOUR PHONE NUMBER, YOUR EMAIL

LOCAL CITIZENS GATHER TO CALL FOR DEBT SOLUTIONS

Concerned local citizens to host a “Dinner to Fix the Debt” on the town green Friday evening.

Springfield, NH - The “Dinner to Fix the Debt” on Friday evening will be one of hundreds of such events taking place across the country, as citizens all over gather to express their concern over the impending fiscal cliff if no action is taken to put the US on a safer economic path. Congressman Smith will be attending to address his constituents interests, and detail his plan for the debt. Organizers will be supplying dinner, educational materials, and “zero debt donuts” to attendees.

WHAT: “Dinner to Fix the Debt”, which will be a community supper with featured speakers from the university, as well as Congressman Smith.

WHO: Fix the Debt campaign volunteers, allied organizations, along with faith leaders, students, and more.

WHERE: The town green.

WHEN: Supper begins at 6pm, speakers will begin at 6:45pm on Friday, August 29.

Events in Springfield are part of the national campaign Fix the Debt, a national non-partisan movement to put America on a more stable fiscal and economic path.

Sample Press Release

Key tips to remember about press releases:

- Include your contact details at the top
- Include at least one great quote from one of your spokespeople
- Follow the format below!

Sample Press Release

For Immediate Release

August 30, 2012

Contact: YOUR NAME, YOUR PHONE NUMBER, YOUR EMAIL

100 Springfield citizens turn out to “dine to fix the debt”

SPRINGFIELD, NH – Today, local volunteers of a new national effort, Fix the Debt, organized a “Dinner to Fix the Debt” on the town green, an educational event to inform their fellow citizens about the looming problems associated with a growing national debt. The event is part of a campaign comprised of Americans from across the ideological and socio-economic spectrum who are calling for Congress and the President to take real action on the public national debt. America’s gross debt is more than \$16 trillion.

“We are Americans who believe that the national debt is the single biggest challenge facing America and who wanted to give other concerned citizens a bullhorn with which to be heard,” said John Doe, one of the local organizers of the dinner. “The debt crisis touches us all and threatens the things we value most about our nation, including a strong social safety net, national security, economic growth and a shot at the American dream for our children.

Congressman Smith made a campaign appearance at the event, where he detailed his approach to the national debt, and fielded questions from his constituents. Springfield University economics professor Jane Ellis also spoke, giving an educational briefing to participants about the United States’ fiscal situation. Local campaign organizers handed out “zero debt donuts”, educational materials, and collected signatures on the Citizen’s Petition to Fix the Debt.

The Citizen’s Petition is non-partisan and suggests what almost everyone knows: that the country’s unsustainable debt needs to be addressed in a timely manner, and politicians from both parties will have to come together to find a viable plan. People who sign the petition agree on six fundamental principles: 1) America’s debt is unsustainable; 2) any solution must address all parts of the budget including cutting spending, reforming entitlements and reforming the tax code and eliminating tax loopholes to raise revenues; 3) any solution must protect America’s core values; 4) finding common ground is essential; 5) the national interest is more important than special interests; and 6) the time to act is now.

The Steering Committee for the nonpartisan Campaign to Fix the Debt includes: Erskine Bowles, Senator Alan Simpson, Senator Judd Gregg, Governor Ed Rendell, Governor Phil Bredesen, David Cote, Congressman Jim McCrery, Senator Sam Nunn, Michael Peterson, Steven Rattner, and Ambassador Robert Zoellick.

The Campaign to Fix the Debt is a national non-partisan movement to put America on a more stable fiscal and economic path. For more information, please visit www.FixTheDebt.org.