

OPINION

How do we respond to letters to the editor?

“Please stop publishing letters about (X). We don’t want to read negative opinions in our local newspaper.”

“When you print people’s horrible letters, it reflects badly on our community.”

“You are aggravating a terrible situation — just let it go away.”



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These comments and similar ones tend to come across the editorial desk — by telephone, email or letter, some signed and some anonymous — when controversy embroils the community, the state or nation. Currently, sexual harassment, Islamophobia, President Donald Trump’s tweets, gender identification and sexual orientation lead the list.

How do we respond to such questions from readers? Sometimes by asking a question in return.

► Who defines “negative”?

Racial inequality was once the norm, for example. Some people considered segregation positive. Today we call this racism.

Thanks to thousands of marchers, speakers and, yes, writers of letters to the editor, the civil rights movement was born. Things began to change.

If society doesn’t continue talking about equality, exposing pockets of hatred and championing a nation for all, we’ll go backwards.

► What’s more “horrible” — a free press or the power to silence it?

Tackling tough issues is sign of a healthy community. Indeed, of a healthy democracy.

You don’t have to think long and hard to imagine in a place (North Korea, Russia, Nazi Germany, etc.) where writing something “horrible” may result in exile or death.

Our Founding Fathers believed that we would be a stronger nation if people weren’t simply allowed but actually encouraged to share dissenting views.

That’s what letters to the editor are about.

► What makes you think that if the Hudson Star Observer decided to stop publishing letters that some controversy or tragedy would “go away”?

Ignoring a wrong rarely solves anything. In fact, doing so can perpetuate it — something that the growing list of people finally speaking out about sexual harassment has made abundantly clear in recent weeks.

Not all letters appear in print. We reject some for libel and other legal reasons. A few we send back to the writers for redraft while others may appear only online. Regardless of the writer, we reserve the right to edit all letters and viewpoints, taking care not to change the meaning.

We publish your letters and those of your neighbor to give both sides (and the middle) a voice — whether we agree with you or not. Send us a letter. Your signed words in print will become part of the community’s permanent record. Your response could help to resolve an issue or help a fellow reader.

Please, join and elevate the public discussion.



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A STEP BACK IN TIME

From the HSO archives