

Dear Melissa,

12/28/06

Following up on our phone conversation of Wednesday, I want to thank you for giving me so much of your time. I am going to CC this email to Mr. Gardner as well because I think he may want to hear the suggestions I am going to make.

Whether we know (admit) it or not, each of us has an inherent perspective on life and politics. Being subjective in the views we project is very natural. It takes an effort to be objective but if we force ourselves to step into someone else's shoes just one time, it gets progressively easier until eventually we find it more natural to be objective and therefore more easily understood by a wider variety of people.

I am convinced that your newspaper, while very good, can be so much more if you add just a little tweaking to your editorial process. I want to discuss your policy of addressing only local issues and limiting the banter to two responses. As you know, electronic media has had a negative impact on newspapers in general. Circulation is not what it could or should be. People read less in general, preferring to watch their news on television or the Internet. The speed of TV and radio is something that newspapers cannot compete with. But newspapers have a distinct advantage in other areas and can realize much more of their potential by identifying and capitalizing on those strengths, which is what I would like you to consider.

The most important writings in our nation's history were letters to editors. Our nation would not exist if not for The Federalist Papers. Topical, threaded letters in your newspaper have immense potential. Printing a wider variety of topical letters in a series will allow for each letter to be shorter as writers don't have to anticipate and address potential responses in the same letter. The end of a series will come when a conclusion is reached naturally, to the satisfaction of more people. More people will buy your paper in anticipation of the next chapter of a debate. I also believe the letters will become more civil.

Additionally, the concept of having Point and Counter-Point articles in the same issue as the Times Union often does, would generate even more interest from your readers. Many years ago a letter writer sent me a copy of a letter he was sending to a local paper and I convinced the editor to print my response along side it. The result was that more people, who would not normally be inclined to refer back to the previous issue in order to follow the thread, reacted very positively to the coordination of the debate.

I hope you will consider these ideas and look forward to working with you in the New Year.

Regards, David Crawmer