



# Your Right to Know

**Bill of Rights, Amendment I: Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press....**

The founding fathers believed in the ability of the people to make rational decisions when provided with sufficient information. Newspapers provide information to help citizens make reasoned choices for themselves and about their government. The press serves as a “watchdog,” reporting on the actions and decisions of government at local, state and national levels.

In 1791, the “press” consisted of newspapers and pamphlets. Later, the courts applied First Amendment freedoms to radio, television and movies and now must apply the first amendment to communication delivered over computers, phones and other technologies.

### Use the news:

Do you follow the news about any elected officials?

Scan your local and/or

regional newspapers for information

about government at all levels. List the pages where you find information and list the elected officials named in the stories:

Pages

Names

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. A mayor

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. A commissioner

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. A state legislator

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. The governor

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. A judge serving in a state court

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. A member of the United States Congress

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. The president of the United States

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. A judge serving on a federal court

\_\_\_\_\_

Visit your newspaper’s Web site or use the newspaper’s e-Edition to find out more about one of the public officials. Search the newspaper’s archive, using key words, such as the official’s name and/or title. What more do you learn about the public official and his/her responsibilities?

### What does the quote mean?

*“Let the people know the facts and the country will be safe.”*

**Abraham Lincoln**

*This is the first of a five-part series on the Bill of Rights created from Citizens Together: You and Your Newspaper, a Newspaper In Education teaching guide for elementary, middle and high school students, created for the NAA Foundation by Sherrye Dee Garrett, Ed.D. & Beverly S. Morrison, Ph.D. Updated 2013 by authors Carianne Bernadowski, Ph.D., Steven Rickman & Danielle Hocko.*

# Your Right to Express Your Opinion



**Bill of Rights, Amendment I: Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press....**

The First Amendment guarantees freedom of speech including the right of citizens to express opinions about the actions of individual public officials and/ or the government. Reporters will often quote citizens knowledgeable about or affected by issues, and letters to the editor serve as forums for readers to express their opinions. Editorial or the opposite-editorial pages often feature columns written by local experts or concerned readers. Newspapers also express their own opinions in editorials and publish the opinions of local and syndicated columnists.

Web or electronic editions offer additional opportunities for newspapers to publish opinions. On Web sites, many newspapers invite readers to comment on stories. Individual reporters and editors offer commentary on blogs, and readers may post responses. Newspapers link to blogs written by citizens in the community.

## What does the quote mean?

*“An unconditional right to say what one pleases about public affairs is what I consider to be the minimum guarantee of the First Amendment.”*

**Hugo LaFayette Black,  
Supreme Court Justice**

## Use the News:

Does your newspaper report on citizens speaking out about local issues? Choose a quote about an issue that interests you. Who is quoted? Do you agree or disagree with the quote? Explain why.

Quote:

I agree       I disagree

because

Read your local newspaper in print and online identify problems that trouble citizens in your community. Learn more about a problem that concerns you. Search the Web and/or e-Edition of your newspaper, using key words related to the issue. What more do you learn about the causes and effects of the problem? What solutions are proposed? Does any solution appeal to you? How might you reach others in your classroom or community with your ideas?

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# Your Right to Assemble

**Bill of Rights, Amendment I: Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of people peaceably to assemble....**

The First Amendment guarantees the right of the people to meet in groups and call for action. Newspapers cover protests, such as marches or pickets, held to urge some action from the government. The First Amendment allows even the most unpopular views to be heard but forbids overt acts of violence.

The right to assemble extends to individuals, groups or associations. Groups may exert more influence than individuals working alone. Organizations provide members with information, forums for their opinions and channels through which to work for change.

## Use the News:

Do you belong to or know about a group in your community? What does the group want the government to do?

In the news, find examples of groups trying to change laws or public policy.

Political parties

Unions

Advocacy groups (environment, health care...)

Other

Learn more about a group that interests you. Search the Web and/or e-Edition of your newspaper for information about the group, its goals and methods. What did you learn about the ways the group interacts with government?

## What does the quote mean?

*“If there is any principle of the Constitution that more imperatively calls for attachment than any other, it is the principle of free thought—not free for those who agree with us, but freedom for the thought we hate.”*

**Oliver Wendell Holmes,  
Supreme Court Justice**

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# Your Rights in a Trial

## Bill of Rights, Amendments V, VI and VII

The Bill of Rights protects the rights of individuals accused of a crime. A capital crime requires an indictment from a grand jury made up of citizens. Prosecutions require trial by jury, a speedy trial and legal representation for those who hire their own lawyer and those who cannot.

Free speech and press also serve as safeguards. Newspapers cover legal actions including arrests, investigations and trials. Occasional conflict arises between Amendments I and VI, however. Attorneys representing those charged with a crime may claim that pre-trial publicity keeps the defendant from receiving a fair trial. The judge may change the location of the trial if he/she finds that pre-trial publicity prevents a fair trial.

### What does the quote mean?

*“There can be no equal justice where the kind of trial a man gets depends on the amount of money he has.”*

**Hugo LaFayette Black,  
Supreme Court Justice**

See other quotes at  
<http://tinyurl.com/equaljusticelibrary>

### Use the News:

What do you know about what happens when someone is charged with a crime or brought to trial? Which of the following do you find in your newspaper? What more do you learn? List the pages where you find references:

	Pages
Arrest	_____
Investigation	_____
Trial	_____
Lawyer	_____
Judge	_____
Witness	_____
Other legal proceeding	_____

Readers must keep track of all information reported on a trial to understand fully the facts and opinions offered on both sides. Search the Web and/or e-Edition of your newspaper for more information about a legal action reported in today's newspaper. Keep following the story, reading straight news, columns, editorials and opinions offered in letters to the editor. Evaluate arguments regarding the guilt or innocence of the defendant.

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# Your Right to be Secure



**Bill of Rights, Amendment IV: The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.**

Amendment IV embodies the founding fathers' belief that citizens should be secure in their home and property. The police, public servants who are part of the government, may not search people or their homes or take property without good reason. Before entering someone's home or taking someone's property, police must request a search warrant, and a judge must determine if a search is justified.

**What does the quote mean?**

*"...It is not the breaking of his doors, and the rummaging of his drawers, that constitutes the essence of the offense; but it is the invasion of his indefeasible right of personal security, personal liberty, and private property...."*

**Joseph P. Bradley,  
Supreme Court Justice**

## **Use the News:**

What do you think might cause police to request a warrant to search someone's home, car or other property?

Find an example in your newspaper:

1. What were the police looking for?
2. Where did the police search?
3. Who owned the place they searched?
4. Who gave the police permission to search?

Search your newspaper's Web site and/or e-Edition to find out what prompts police to request and receive search warrants. What do you learn? Does anyone oppose or object to the searches? On what grounds?

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