

How to comment on topical issues

Press Release



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DISCLAIMER

The sample press releases in this booklet are fictitious. Any link to persons or organisations is entirely coincidental.

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What is a comment release?

A GREAT RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Everybody wants to be a thought-leader, but few are courageous enough to put their thoughts out there.

That's what a comment release is all about. It allows you, as a representative of your organisation, to give a short comment on a relevant issue in your industry, in government or in the broader economy. It's easy, takes very little time and generates huge PR mileage.

You might even become an authority or expert, and end up being invited to participate in interviews, presentations and even conferences. Comment releases are an integral part of any good PR campaign.



MEDIA STATEMENT

26 September 2019

Issued by The National Drivers' Association

For immediate release

1. **Red-light cameras “more about money than road safety”** Driver lobby group slams move to install more cameras citywide

2.

3. Red-light cameras are more about extorting money from motorists than improving road safety, the head of the National Drivers' Association, Jane Merrick, said today.

She was reacting to an announcement by the municipality this week that dozens of new cameras are to be installed all across the city to improve safety and reduce accidents.

4.

“Let’s not kid ourselves – this has little to do with safety and everything to do with money,” Merrick said. “Motorists have become a convenient ATM for an inefficient, cash-strapped municipality.”

She said most cameras are on smooth, multi-lane roads where the safety risk is not that great to begin with, but where traffic volumes are high to allow the maximum number of people to be caught. Cameras are hardly ever found near schools or in residential neighborhoods where they might, conceivably, make more sense.

5. “If city officials were genuinely interested in road safety, they’d be fixing potholes, repainting white lines and putting more traffic-patrol vehicles on the streets.”

Merrick questioned the city’s view that the cameras reduce accidents at intersections where they are installed, and challenged officials to prove this with hard numbers.

“We haven’t seen a single study that supports their assertion,” she said. “Yet we know from personal experience that cameras often bring out the worst in drivers – to avoid being flashed, they speed up and run the red light, or worse, brakes suddenly, increasing the risk of a rear-end collision.”

She acknowledged that studies have found that the cameras reduce both red-light violations and accidents; however, other studies in Canada and the United States have found the exact opposite, and also reveal increased rear-end collisions.

“The evidence is, at best, mixed,” said Merrick. “We are all for improved road safety and better driver behaviour. We just don’t think red-light cameras are the best way to achieve that.”

END

6.

Anatomy of a comment release

BOLD HEADLINE

1.

If your headline doesn’t work, all bets are off. So, make sure it captures the essence of your story. A combination of headline and sub-headline usually allows you to get more meaning across. To see if it works, try to imagine what it might look like in the newspaper

POWERFUL INTRO

2.

Don’t be wishy-washy. Come right out and say what you want to say, forthrightly and with conviction. The more contrarian your view, the better, because it stimulates public debate. Don’t worry about being one-sided – that’s the whole point. Leave the counter-argument to someone else.

CONTEXT

3.

A comment release is usually (though not always) in response to some new development, so the context explains this. Context also means being quick, so be sure to issue your release within 24-48 hours of an issue breaking, otherwise the window of opportunity closes.

SOUNDBITE

4.

Work hard on getting this right, because it’s the one line from your release that you want to see and hear repeated in the media the next day. It should be short, memorable, and written in the kind of conversational language you’d hear over a drink or around the dinner table.

SUPPORTING ARGUMENT

5.

Don’t get bogged down in a lengthy analysis that the media has neither the time nor the space to report; just cover the essence in a few tight paragraphs. An argument can almost always be distilled in three short points. You don’t have to say it all; you just have to say enough.

WRAP-UP

6.

Sign off with a quote that neatly wraps up what you’ve just spoken about. Inject a degree of reasonableness into it, so that people feel that they understand why you’ve made such a strong argument in the preceding paragraphs.



MEDIA STATEMENT

26 September 2019

Issued by Big Bargains

For immediate release

Government challenged to go further in cutting import duties

Economic benefits would be “massive”, says Big Bargains CEO

The government did the right thing in cutting import duty on motor vehicles, and should consider similar measures on all consumer imports, Christopher Harris, CEO of Big Bargains store chain, said today.

He was reacting to the government’s decision, announced in yesterday’s Budget address in Parliament, to slash the import duty on new motor vehicles from 30% to 12% in a bid to encourage new-vehicle ownership.

“Why stop at motor vehicles?” Harris said. “What’s good for cars is surely good for washing machines, personal computers and clothing too.”

Nearly half of the average consumer’s annual household purchases is made up of imported goods, he said, and they’re all subject to import duties – some running as high as 80%. Slashing these duties would put money into consumers’ pockets, which they could then either spend elsewhere in the economy, or put away in savings.

Harris acknowledged that dramatically cutting import duties would result in reduced tax revenue for government in the short term, but reckoned that the country’s finances – currently in surplus – are probably strong enough to handle it. Longer term, the benefits of cheaper goods and greater disposable income would have a multiplier effect throughout the economy in terms of employment, the profitability of businesses and, eventually, tax revenue.

“The effect of cheaper consumer goods would be massive,” said Harris. “It’s good for consumers, good for business and good for the economy.”

END



MEDIA STATEMENT

26 September 2019

Carter & Carter

For immediate release

Landlords should be allowed to evict non-paying tenants

New law to prevent this will backfire, warns property lawyer

Legislation aimed at preventing landlords from evicting tenants who cannot pay their rent would have the unintended consequence of making it harder for the poor to find rental accommodation, John Merino, property lawyer at legal firm Carter & Carter, said today.

He was commenting on a statement yesterday by Housing Minister, Stella Hunt, that her Ministry was considering such legislation in a bid to protect “cash-strapped tenants” in the current economic downturn.

“The Minister’s concern for the less well-off in the current harsh economic climate is well-intentioned,” said Merino. “However, good intentions don’t necessarily produce good legislation.”

If the legislation were passed, landlords and property owners would face the risk of having to house non-paying tenants at their own cost for months or even years, he said. They would therefore seek to minimise this risk by not renting out their properties to the poor or low paid in the first place.

“The legislation would hurt the very people it was intended to help, and ensure that only those with secure, well-paying jobs were able to find accommodation,” said Merino.

He cited the example of similar legislation that was passed in France in 1982 – the so-called Quillot Law, named after the government minister responsible for it. The law ended up locking the poor out of much of the rental market, and significantly reduced the construction of new rental accommodation – which restricted supply and pushed rents up even more.

The legislation was eventually amended in 1986. “Good legislation is legislation that is workable, and causes minimal economic and social disruption,” said Merino. “That’s why the Housing Ministry should seek the input of tenants, landlords and property investors before proceeding.”

END

Parting thoughts

AN EQUAL-OPPORTUNITY INITIATIVE

You don't have to be the CEO or the chief economist in an organisation to issue a comment release; this kind of initiative is open to anybody with expertise in a given field – from middle managers and IT experts to lawyers and accountants.

Newspapers judge the value of the release mainly by its content and context. If it's a relevant message on an important topic by someone with expertise in that field, it stands a chance of being used.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

If your company is interested in developing real expertise in comment releases, you might want to consider signing up for our Media Writing Workshop, which is advertised on the website www.robertgentle.com under the WORKSHOP section.



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