



First Amendment allows freedoms for everyone

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1 for All.

That's the name of a new campaign set to launch Thursday to build awareness of the importance of the First Amendment.

The American Society of News Editors is spearheading the campaign, which has attracted support from educators, librarians, attorneys, religious leaders and artists of all disciplines. One of the first celebrity-level people to agree to appear in ads for the campaign is Monroe County's John Mellencamp, said Ken Paulson, founder of the 1 for All campaign.

Star power from the likes of Mellencamp and Ellen DeGeneres will be helpful in getting the message across.

The truth is, most Americans don't know what the First Amendment says. Most Americans, when pressed, can probably come up with freedom of speech. But how many can name the other four freedoms it guarantees?

Those would be freedom of the press, freedom of religion, freedom to assemble and freedom to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

Paulson, the president of the Newseum and First Amendment Center and the former editor of USA Today, calls that lack of knowledge "constitutional illiteracy of the highest order."

He hopes the campaign will be as ubiquitous and successful as the "Got Milk" campaign — or, he says, have the power of the marketing efforts of the National Rifle Association.

"I have the greatest admiration for the NRA and the tenacity and consistency of its message," he said at the annual ASNE conference in April. "Somehow the NRA has made the Second Amendment seem like the most patriotic one. But only one amendment is used by all Americans every day and that's the First Amendment."

Paulsen, an eloquent spokesman for the importance and power of the First Amendment, notes in a column about 1 for All that the five freedoms "guaranteed (in the First

Amendment) gave Americans the right to speak out against injustice, to report about inequality, to protest and petition, and to draw strength from freedom of faith. In the centuries that followed this nation's founding, the First Amendment was used to free the slaves, extend the vote to women and ensure equal protection under the law."

The concept behind 1 for All is to try to create a better understanding about the First Amendment and the need to protect all voices, all views and all faiths.

H-T readers will see the first ad from this campaign on Thursday.

Other ads will follow, here and in other media outlets.

Some key points about this campaign are: It's nonpartisan; it's about education and will provide teaching materials from a Web site; it's interactive and will encourage submissions by students and others who want to comment on the value of the various freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment.

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

Those are the 45 words we're talking about. I hope you agree they are worth your attention and support.