

Proposal by Media Liaison Committee

Guidelines for Dealing with the Media

Anyone who addresses the media about WAC is responsible for how WAC is represented, even if we speak only as individual members. Remember that you may only speak on behalf of the group when you quote from the WAC mission statement or on positions authorized by the floor. Otherwise, please make it clear that you speak as an individual.

Use your best judgement in dealing with the media to control your own representation. Here are some general guidelines:

- Ask the reporter to identify himself or herself.
- Ask when and where the piece will appear.
- Do you feel comfortable with being interviewed? If not, you may politely refer the reporter to the spokesperson for the action or to the designated member of the media liaison committee.
Kathy Beat *Rachel Zarlone*
- Avoid saying "no comment." Those words send the message that WAC has something to hide or refuses to cooperate with the media.
- Remember that regardless of his or her politics, the journalist needs to get a story and good quotes. Better from us than someone else.
- Know what message WAC wants to deliver. Define these issues and keep them in the forefront throughout the interview. (See next page for tips.)
- Be concise. Think in terms of 10-second sound bites and one-sentence quotes.
- Remember that "off the record" means only that you cannot be quoted directly. Everything you say may be used as background.
- Assume that every word you speak is "on the record" unless you have a clear, specific understanding with the reporter. The reporter may assume that only one statement is off the record while you intended to keep the entire conversation private. Ask the reporter to verify your understanding.
- Request that, as a courtesy, your quotes be read back to you before publication. However, it is inappropriate to request to see or approve the entire article.
- Brief the media liaison after the interview and inform the archives committee of expected dates of publication.

Answering Difficult Questions

It's best to answer appropriate questions directly. But it is also possible to use even the most inappropriate question as an opportunity to make your point. This is a technique called 'bridging'. Simply acknowledge the question, then lead into the point you wish to make.

Here are some examples of ways to deal with difficult questions:

Q: "How do you define feminism?" (Question is too broad.)

A: "That's a good question. Personally, I feel that every woman has certain rights. These include" (draw from WAC's mission statement to introduce the message you want to deliver.)

Q: "Does WAC support the tactics of ACT UP?" (Irrelevant question.)

A: "I think a better question is whether WAC is committed to an end to homophobia. And we are. We also believe" (Bridge to message.)

Q: "Isn't it true that WAC encourages. . . . ?" (Touchy question - one that you don't feel comfortable addressing.)

A: "I can't speak for every woman in our group. WAC is a coalition of women who each have their own points of view. But one thing I (we) believe in is every woman's right to. . . ." (Return to the issue.)

Q: "Since you hate all men, don't you expect them to resist your ideas?" (Leading/no-win question: when did you stop beating your wife?)

A: "Perhaps I need to clarify our position. I believe that everyone, men and women, must work together"
(CAUTION: Try not to repeat invalid wording. The answer "We don't hate all men," for instance, could become a devastating quote.)

Other possible transitions:

"That's an interesting question, but I think the real question is"

"I don't know about that, but I can say that we"

"If I understand your question, what you're really asking is. . . ."

WAC Media Liaison Committee Mission Statement

The Women's Action Coalition Media Liaison Committee serves as a powerful resource for WAC and all of its committees. Our goal is to serve WAC's objectives by capturing every opportunity to project our message to the public through the media. We accomplish this mission through a cooperative effort between our media specialists and all WAC members, uniting our diverse talents to create a masterful public relations program.

General Media Relations

- We are the primary WAC contact for members of the media, serving as an accessible central resource to facilitate coverage, coordinate efforts, and direct journalists to appropriate WAC experts.
- We maintain a media list that represents the entire spectrum of Houston's diverse culture.
- We aggressively pursue opportunities to win favorable media exposure for WAC and our issues.
- We are dedicated to building effective working relationships with the working press corps.
- We value our reputation as a reliable, authoritative source of media information on relevant women's issues. We serve as a comprehensive resource to make journalists' jobs easier, as our support encourages timely, accurate, sensitive reporting.
- We are well-informed about WAC, its history, its affairs, its mission and its issues. Although our role is not to act as the voice of WAC, we are prepared to provide general information on these topics whenever necessary.
- We refer journalists to a member of the appropriate WAC committee for specific information about WAC actions and issues. We assist these members with follow-up and support, including pre-interview media training.
- Because our goal is to empower all WAC members to serve as effective WAC representatives, we offer interview training sessions to the general membership.
- We request all members of WAC to inform us of any media opportunities they may be aware of, and to brief us after they have been interviewed by the press so that we may provide follow-up.

Action and Committee Support

- We are eager to support WAC actions as well as standing committees with the full power of our media expertise.
- We provide the most effective assistance when we meet with the action coordinator before any action is proposed to the floor to assess the publicity opportunities and public relations implications of the planned action.
- Working with the action committee, we develop a specific media plan and press materials to support the action. We write and distribute press releases, coordinate news conferences, and provide other media support. This requires as much time as possible.
- We encourage WAC action committees to designate a well-informed member of their committee to act as media spokesperson for each action. We provide this spokesperson with event-specific counseling and training to prepare her for effective media interviews.
- Our role at actions is to assist with press conferences and other media details. Whenever possible, we direct reporters to the action spokesperson. If necessary, we ask the spokesperson to brief us so that we may follow up on any media commitments or opportunities.

CONTACT: Cara DeBusk
(713) 639-7531
or: (713) 868-2109

Erin Loftus
(713) 639-7525
or: (713) 523-3400

December 9, 1992

MEDIA ALERT

WHO: Women's Action Coalition & Drum Corps.

WHAT: Protest & buy-in with drumming, WAC Christmas carols, and other creative communication.

WAC will create a visible and powerful street presence to discourage people from buying sexist, violent toys. After staging a resistance against such toys at one store, WAC members will put their money where their ethics are at another store with a BUY-IN of appropriate toys for the children they love or for donation to the Houston Area Women's Center.

WHERE & WHEN:

Protest: 1:30 p.m.
Toys R Us
Kirby & Old Spanish Trail

Buy-In & consciousness-raising: 3:00 p.m.
Stop, Look & Learn
2415 Robinhood @ Morningside in Rice Village

WHY: To encourage people to think before they buy toys that promote violence, reinforce narrowly-defined sex roles, or exploit children as marketing tools for movies and television programs.

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Women's Action Coalition is an open alliance of women committed to direct action on issues affecting the rights of all women.

**WAC is watching. We will take action.
WAC te observa, nosotros tomaremos accion.**

October 23, 1992

CONTACT: Shannon Austin-Wilkie
AM: (713) 522-6363
PM: (713) 526-8722
OR: Teri Boyer
(713) 896-8301

MEDIA ALERT

WHO: Women's Action Coalition and the WAC Drum Corps.

WHAT: Appearance at five "Super Saturday" early-voting rallies.

WHEN: Saturday, October 24, 1992.

WHY: To encourage Hispanic and African-American women to vote.

WHERE: Garnet Coleman's Headquarters, 1902 Blodgett; 10 a.m.
K-Mart, 8230 Kirby; 11:15 a.m.
Kashmere Multi-Service Center, 4802 Lockwood Drive; 3 p.m.
Fiesta Mart, 2300 N. Shepherd; 4:15 p.m.
Acres Homes Houston Public Library, 6209 West
Montgomery; 5:30 p.m.

WAC is an open alliance of women committed to direct action on issues affecting the rights of all women. We are witness to the current economic, social and political pressures that limit women's lives and to the horrifying effects of these limitations. We exercise our full creative power to launch a visible and remarkable resistance. WAC IS WATCHING. WE WILL TAKE ACTION.

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OR: Teri Boyer
(713) 896-8301

October 23, 1992

For Immediate Release

WAC Drums Up Minority Vote at Super Saturday Rallies

[HOUSTON] -- Women's Action Coalition and the WAC Drum Corps will encourage Hispanic and African-American citizens to vote at five rallies in minority neighborhoods Saturday.

The group will caravan from rally to rally, drumming and chanting the message that every vote is important. WAC members will wear white in honor of the suffragettes who fought to win the right for women to vote, said WAC spokesperson Shannon Austin-Wilkie.

The rallies, along with two others, are sponsored by the Harris County Democratic Party to encourage people to cast early ballots on 'Super Saturday', a nationwide get-out-the-vote effort of the party's Unity 92 campaign. However, WAC is a non-partisan alliance of women and has declined to endorse a particular candidate, Austin-Wilkie said.

WAC will appear at the following rally locations: Garnet Coleman's Headquarters, 1902 Blodgett; 10 a.m.; K-Mart, 8230 Kirby, 11:15 a.m.; Kashmere Multi-Service Center, 4802 Lockwood Dr., 3 p.m.; Fiesta Mart, 2300 N. Shepherd, 4:15 p.m.; and Acres Homes Houston Public Library, 6209 West Montgomery, 5:30 p.m..

"WAC believes that it is especially important for women of color to use their vote to make their voices heard in this election," Austin-Wilkie said. "The people hit hardest by the social, economic and political pressures of our times are those who were already in the most precarious position -- minority women."

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WAC Supports Early Voting
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For instance, Austin-Wilkie noted, two in every five black women and 79 % of black children in female-headed households live below the poverty level, according a study by the Women's Research & Education Institute. And while health care costs are skyrocketing, 27 percent of Hispanics and more than 19 percent of Afro-Americans lack health insurance.

"Our vote can make a difference," Austin-Wilkie said. "The fastest-growing group in American electoral politics is African-American women, and the number of Hispanic women voters has increased significantly. WAC believes that it's time to use this voting power to influence the way government affects our lives."

Recent "no excuse" legislation broadened absentee voting rules to allow every registered voter to cast an early ballot. Early voting ends in Texas October 30.

"One of the reasons we're supporting these early-voting rallies is that this legislation has made it easier for minorities to cast their ballots at convenient times and more accessible locations," Austin-Wilkie said. "This makes it possible to win greater minority representation than ever."

WAC is an open alliance of women committed to direct action on issues affecting the rights of all women. WAC supports immediate enactment of an Equal Rights Amendment initiative and an end to homophobia, racism, religious prejudice and violence against women. WAC is a proponent of every woman's right to quality health care, child care and reproductive freedom.

For more information on WAC, call (713) 867-9581. For information on polling locations, call the county clerk's office at 755-6411.