Communications Strategy

Interview Tips for Union Activists

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Media Interview Prep

Things to confirm with reporter:
- What topics will be discussed – and what if anything is off-topic
- Is interview for print or broadcast? If for radio/TV, will it air live or later?
- Sourcing – ask to be attributed as a union leader/member

Your homework:
- Draft/review talking points
- Practice delivering your answers before the interview
- Be ready!
Preparing for an Interview

Carefully review and practice talking points and common questions before interview.
• Know which 2-3 key points you definitely want to make going into the interview and say them out loud to yourself.

Press answers should always:
• Be concise and to the point, avoid run-on answers
• Repeat part of their question so it can make an easy “sound bite”
• Always explain the “why,” not just the “what” and “how” of your response. For example, when talking about federal pay, don’t just say we need a 3.6% pay raise. Talk about how recent pay/benefit cuts have forced millions of feds to delay buying a home, sending kids to college, and putting food on the table, and how this pay adjustment will help make up for lost ground.
• Address the reporter by name during intro and outro
Nailing the Interview

Assume you are always on the record and always being recorded (video and audio)
• Never say you’re speaking “off the record” – especially to large groups of reporters
• Some exceptions can be made for long-trusted reporters, but these are very few

Avoid being overly-friendly with reporters in front of other reporters/official audiences:
• They will write less-favorably about us to compensate for any perceived bias.

If asked about an unfamiliar subject or piece of legislation:
• Say “I don’t have all the facts right now, but we’re reviewing it closely and I will have someone follow up with you,” then pivot back to your talking points on the issue you’re there to discuss.

When interviewing on camera:
• Wear a solid-colored shirt and tie
• Push your glasses to the top of your nose so they do not block your eyes/reflect light
• Assume the microphone is always on and recording for broadcast
• Sit still with hands folder in front of you.
Always Identify Yourself as a Union Member or Officer!

Always be very clear to identify yourself in your union role, be it an officer or member. Do not ever claim to be speaking as a federal employee or agency employee, or ever speak using your job title unless authorized to do so by your agency.

As long as you identify yourself as speaking only as a union activist/officer, the agency cannot prevent your ability to speak to the press over issues of labor relations.
Do Your Homework!

RESOURCES AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

• Press Releases: www.afge.org/press-releases
• News articles: www.afge.org/articles
• Issue Papers: www.afge.org/issuepapers
• Talking Points: www.afge.org/takeaction
• Logos and other visuals: www.afge.org/logos
• Photos on www.flickr.com/afge
Training Materials Online

COMMUNICATIONS TRAINING

- Writing newsletters
- Telling stories
- Conducting interviews
- Building communications campaigns
- Digital and social media tools
- Photo and video tips
- Much, much more!

https://www.afge.org/commstraining
Contact Us

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