

## War Tax Resistance Talking Points for Media Interviews

This outline gives some general preparation and style hints for talking with the media, followed by more specific points about war tax resistance. You don't need to remember every detail, but it might help you set up your own short cheat sheet before an interview.

- When an interview is set up, find out about how long they want you for and, if live, will there be call-in questions.
- Read other articles by the reporter or listen to the show to get a sense of the style and interests of the interviewer.
- Write down some key phrases or points you would like to make ahead of time, so you can be ready to rattle them off when the right moment comes.
- Be prepared (and willing) to add your own personal story and anecdotes from your experiences as a war tax resister.
- Be conversational. When you talk about something that happened with your resistance, the audience wants to know what happened next.
- Use some statistics and references to sound informed about military spending or tax resistance, but don't get too stuck on numbers.
- Tell some personal story that brings in humor.
- **Pre-tax day interviews:** Ask the NWTRCC office for a copy of the national press release and list of actions (or see the tax day page on the NWTRCC website)
- Have in front of you the contact information for how people find out more:  
NWTRCC Website: [www.nwtrcc.org](http://www.nwtrcc.org), Hotline: 800-269-7464  
Local contact: \_\_\_\_\_ or find contacts and counselors on the NWTRCC website

### Some positive phrases that might get you started on talking about WTR:

- WTR is deliberate, practical, and has bottom-line results...
- I want to be at ease with my conscience...
- I feel responsible for what I do with my money...
- I feel more honest now when I say I don't support the war...
- It's time to put my money where my mouth is...
- In Washington, money talks...
- I used to just disapprove of the war, now I oppose it...
- It's direct action I do all year 'round...

### What is war tax resistance? What does it mean to be a WTR?

- People who are opposed to a particular war or to war in general protest by refusing to pay some or all of federal income taxes; some define it as conscientious objection to having taxes drafted for war, i.e., if I don't believe in going to war, I cannot pay for others to do it.
- People are killed by war and military spending, and this is a strong action I can take to protest the killing and then give the money to better uses.
- War tax resistance is a protest of the US economy based on war making or an effort to withdraw support from that system.
- Many war tax resisters give the money away - redirect it to programs for human needs or humanitarian causes

### **Is there a war tax? What taxes are being resisted?**

- There is not a specific war tax. Federal income taxes and some federal excise taxes go into the general fund and are dispersed to the various government agencies and functions. We tend to focus on federal income taxes because approximately half of federal income tax dollars are spent on war or military preparations.
- Some federal excise taxes, like the 3% tax on local phone bills, go into the general fund and are also resisted
- Some self employed WTRs refuse to pay into Social Security because that money is borrowed for general purposes, including war
- Some WTRs also refuse state or local taxes because of the death penalty or the growing militarization of the police in particular

### **How do you do war tax resistance?**

- People do it different ways, depending on their situation and personal motivations.
- Some file a 1040 and send a letter to the IRS saying why they are not paying some or all of the tax owed. They want the government to know about their protest.
- Some don't want to be in the system at all and have any money go to war; they might live on low income and outside the normal economy.
- Some have refused the federal excise tax on telephone service for decades (started during Vietnam War) as a small, low risk protest of war spending
- Most people who refuse to pay income taxes to the federal government give that money away to groups that help people and don't kill them.

### **What is the phone tax?**

- It is a federal excise tax that pays into the general fund (some excise taxes pay for specific things like the highway tax for road improvements)
- It was first put on phone calls during the Spanish American War and was taken off and put on for wars over decades, then made permanent after WWII
- Phone tax resistance was a big campaign during the Vietnam War; as many as 500,000 people participated
- Today the tax is just on landline local phone service; a small tax but one that can be resisted

### **What about the consequences? What happens to war tax resisters?**

- Refusing to pay taxes that the IRS thinks you owe is an act of civil disobedience; if you owe, it is likely the government will try to collect. They may or may not succeed. For people "off the books" or out of the system there may be no record for the IRS to trace.
- The IRS sends threatening letters, and they can take money from bank accounts or wages
- In our network it is very unusual to get taken to court or face a jail sentence; mostly the IRS wants to collect the money they say is owed
- Any method might require some inconvenience, but it's a small risk compared to what happens to people in war. For most of us it's more important to protest or not participate in the war system
- People who live off the books or out of the system make lifestyle choices, whether living in community or bartering, to maintain their method of refusal

- There are positive consequences, like the good feeling of giving the money away to projects that help people
- Participating in an act of civil disobedience means accepting some level of risk.
- People run up credit card debt and pay high interest rates to buy things; war tax resisters risk a few percentage points of interest and penalties to fight for what they think is right.
- Certain actions are potentially riskier than others (such as, 100% resistance vs. refusing to pay \$10); each resister decides what level of risk they will accept.

### **Won't the IRS get the money anyway?**

- Among resisters in our network we have found that more money has been kept from the government than seized
- For many not paying voluntarily is the important thing; if collected they feel that they forced the government to recognize the protest
- Some resisters try to keep their money from being collected and going to war. They might not have bank accounts, live on cash, quit jobs if the IRS tries to seize your wages

### **What about the good things the government does that you are not paying for?**

- Most war tax resisters reroute what they don't pay to programs that contribute to the common good, often to programs that have been underfunded by the government
- Half of federal taxes contribute to killing; if there was a war tax I would refuse it but the government throws all the money in one pot
- Many war tax resisters do pay state and local taxes, Social Security and Medicare taxes, sales taxes, many excise taxes
- People are told that paying taxes is part of being a good citizen; taking a stand to make the world a better place is another way to look at what makes a good citizen.
- Anarchists in our network who make the connection that taxes are historically first imposed by states to pay for wars

### **What is the difference between you and other tax protesters who don't like IRS or say the tax laws are not constitutional, etc.?**

- Many war tax resisters don't say we don't have to pay taxes, but that we can't pay for war
- War tax resisters are not refusing taxes for personal gain; most give the money away and take open risks to protest or to live on very low incomes
- Nonviolently breaking laws has had a long and honorable tradition in the U.S. Many people know of Henry David Thoreau and his night in jail for refusing to pay his taxes as a protest to slavery and the Mexican-American War.

### **How many people do this?**

- It's hard to count war tax resisters – a lot of people do it quietly, don't announce themselves; there are at least a few thousand involved
- There is no one national membership group for individual WTRs. NWTRCC has 48 Affiliate groups, plus a couple thousand individuals on our mailing list. We could guess at about 8,000 – 10,000 war tax resisters but it's hard to say.
- As an individual act of civil disobedience not everyone chooses to join a group or sign onto a public statement

- Every year we hear from people who are doing WTR but just found out about the network.
- Since 1998 Congress said that the IRS cannot designate individual taxpayers as “illegal tax-protesters” to avoid stigmatizing people, so if they have a count they do not make it public.
- During Vietnam War there were tens of thousands refusing some or all of their taxes—up to half million phone tax resisters

### **What is NWTRCC?**

- The National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee (NWTRCC) is a coalition of local, regional, and national groups supportive of war tax resistance, refusal, and redirection.
- There are 48 national, regional, and local affiliate groups, nationally including War Resisters League, Mennonite Central Committee, Voices for Creative Nonviolence, and the Center on War and Conscience.
- The NWTRCC office serves as a clearinghouse and maintains a list of Contacts & Counselors around the country.

### **How did NWTRCC get started?**

- The military build-up, wars in Central America, and a focus on nuclear weapons during the Reagan years led to more war tax resisters
- Groups involved in war tax resistance came together to found a new umbrella organization in 1982 to share resources and coordinate actions

### **What about the protests demanding corporations pay their fair share?**

- There are many changes in the U.S. system that need to happen; a way to better share the vast resources of this country is desperately needed
- My focus has first been on changing the nation’s priorities from war to life needs – like saving the earth for all of nature
- We can call on the rich and corporations to pay more taxes but I don’t want 50% of those tax dollars going to war and military spending
- Corporations make huge profits off of war; we need to include talk about the military-industrial complex to get to the change that so many of us want.

### **How do you figure out what percent to resist?**

- Most WTRs who resist a percent of their taxes use the War Resisters league pie chart or similar calculations from other peace groups
- Some refuse 50%, others the percent paying for current wars, some use a symbolic amount like \$10.40.
- Others say that if any amount is paid in federal taxes half will go to war so they refuse 100%

### **What if everyone were to pick and choose which taxes they would pay?**

- If people are willing to nonviolently resist taxes for whatever cause and deal with the consequences, that’s their decision.
- War tax resisters are not shirking their civic duty by refusing to pay the IRS. Most reroute their taxes into programs hurt by the military spending and misplaced priorities of the U.S. government.
- By taking personal responsibility for how my tax dollars are spent, I make sure that Congress isn’t spending them irresponsibly.