



ADVOCACY IN ACTION: Tips for Attending Town Halls

One of the most effective—and most underutilized—ways to communicate directly with Members of Congress is to attend their town hall meetings. Members of Congress take to heart what they hear directly from constituents who make the effort to show up at a town hall meeting.

Members see attendees first and foremost as concerned voters. In addition, the media often attends these meetings providing another opportunity to spread the message.

If you would like to ask a question, here are some tips:

- 1. LEARN THE PROCEDURE:** Upon arriving at the town hall meeting, check to see whether there is an established procedure for the meeting. For example, most offices will provide a place for constituents to sign in. Often there is a separate sign up sheet for individuals who would like to ask questions. Remember: check with the staff when you arrive about the proper procedure, and be sure to comply.
- 2. BE PREPARED** in advance with your specific question. Bring supporting materials that you can provide to the staffer, who will be traveling with/accompanying the Member. Also, be sure to avoid long, drawn out questions, and do not use jargon or acronyms that people may not know – you do not want to annoy or alienate the Member, staff, audience, or media.
- 3. CLEARLY IDENTIFY YOURSELF.** Consider your introduction to be an integral part of your question.
- 4. BE POLITE AND PROFESSIONAL.** Keep in mind that the media is probably attending. Remember: even if the Member does not agree with you or evades your question and it is frustrating, you are most effective by being polite, calm, and persistent.
- 5. ASK FOR A RESPONSE TO YOUR QUESTION.** If she/he cannot give you a response, let the Member know you will be arranging another opportunity for further discussion and that you look forward to a response at that time. The point is not to embarrass the Member, but to engage him/her and seem reasonable. Remember: you can always follow-up from your question at the town hall meeting with a formal letter. You should reference your attendance at the meeting, giving the date and location, and ask for follow-up from your inquiry.
- 6. USE YOUR JUDGMENT** The dynamics of town hall meetings can be shaped by factors beyond your control. If the audience is riled up over an issue, and you get the feeling that participating would be counter-productive, it might be best to stay silent or take a pass when given the opportunity to ask a question.
- 7. SAY HELLO** Depending on the setting and the number of people attending, make an effort to say hello and introduce yourself to the Member and the staffer before or after the meeting. Be sure to give them any materials you brought along with your personal/home contact information. Remember: ask for the staffer's name and request a business card, so you know with whom you should follow-up.