

INDIVISIBLE:

HOW TO HAVE A SUCCESSFUL TOWN HALL

The week of February 17-26 is the first district work period (“recess”) of the new Congress. Members of Congress (MoCs) will be back home holding public events and meeting with constituents. These meetings are a great opportunity for your group to remind your MoCs that they need to stand up for you—and that means standing up against the Trump agenda. Below are some tips on how to maximize this opportunity to influence your MoCs.

PREPARE

1. **Find out when your MoC’s next public town hall event is.** Sometimes these are announced well in advance. But sometimes, although they are technically “public,” only select constituents are notified about them shortly before the event. If you can’t find announcements online, call your MoC directly to find out. When you call, be friendly and say to the staffer, “Hi, I’m a constituent, and I’d like to know when his/her next town hall forum will be.” If they don’t know, ask to be added to the email list so that you get notified when they do.
2. **Send out a notice of the town hall to your group, post the event on the [Indivisible Action website](#), and get commitments from group members to attend.** Distribute whatever information you have on your MoC’s voting record, as well as prepared questions, to all group members.
3. **Prepare several questions ahead of time for your group to ask.** Your questions should be sharp and fact-based, ideally including information on the MoC’s record, votes they’ve taken, or statements they’ve made. Thematically, questions should focus on a limited number of issues to maximize impact: right now, the proposed repeal of the Affordable Care Act is one of the most important. It is also critical for Senate Democrats to stand up to Trump’s radical Supreme Court nominee, and for all MoCs to oppose his racist Muslim and refugee ban. Prepare 5-10 questions and hand them out to your group ahead of the meeting. Example question:

“I and many district families in Springfield rely on the Affordable Care Act. I don’t think we should be taking healthcare away from more than 30 million Americans, and this repeal will create serious financial hardship for people who can’t afford it. You haven’t gone on the record opposing this. Will you commit here and now to vote no on repealing the Affordable Care Act?”
4. **Get connected to local press.** Research on [Google News](#) what local reporters have written about your MoCs. Find and follow those reporters on Twitter, and build relationships. Before you head to the town hall, reach out and explain why you and your group are attending, and provide them with background materials and a quote. Journalists on deadline—even those who might not agree with you—appreciate when you provide easy material for a story. Prepare to take videos—this will make your experience that much more newsworthy.



SHOULD I BRING A SIGN?

Signs can be useful for reinforcing the sense of broad agreement with your message. However, if you're holding an oppositional sign, staffers will almost certainly not give you or the people with you the chance to get the mic or ask a question. If you have enough people to both ask questions and hold signs, though, then go for it!

AT THE TOWN HALL

1. **Get there early, meet up, and get organized.** Meet outside or in the parking lot for a quick huddle before the event. Distribute the handout of questions, and encourage members to ask the questions on the sheet or similar ones. Review your ground rules: you're going to be respectful, polite, and non-confrontational in all of your interactions with the MoC and their staff.
2. **Get seated and spread out.** Head into the venue a bit early to grab seats at the front half of the room, but do not all sit together. Sit by yourself or in groups of two, and spread out throughout the room. This will help reinforce the impression of broad consensus.
3. **Make your voices heard by asking good questions.** When the MoC opens the floor for questions, everyone in the group should put their hands up and keep them there. Look friendly or neutral so that staffers will call on you. When you're asking a question, remember the following guidelines:

Stick with the prepared list of questions. Don't be afraid to read it straight from the printout if you need to.

Be polite but persistent, and demand real answers. MoCs are very good at deflecting or dodging questions they don't want to answer. If the MoC dodges, ask a follow-up question. If they aren't giving you real answers, then call them out for it. Other group members around the room should amplify by either booing the MoC or applauding you.

Don't give up the mic until you're satisfied with the answer. If you've asked a hostile question, a staffer will often try to limit your ability to follow up by taking the microphone back immediately after you finish speaking. They can't do that if you keep a firm hold on the mic. If they object, then say politely but loudly: "I'm not finished. The MoC is dodging my question. Why are you trying to stop me from following up?"

Keep the pressure on. After one member of the group finishes, everyone should raise their hands again. The next member of the group to be called on should move down the list of questions and ask the next one.

4. **Support the group and reinforce the message.** After one member of your group asks a question, everyone should applaud to show that the feeling is shared throughout the audience. Whenever someone from your group gets the mic, they should note that they're building on the previous questions—amplifying the fact that you're part of a broad group.

5. **Record everything!** Assign someone in the group to use their smart phone or video camera to record other advocates asking questions and the MoC's response. While written transcripts are nice, unfavorable exchanges caught on video can be devastating for MoCs. These clips can be shared through social media and picked up by local and national media. Please familiarize yourself with your state and local laws that govern recording, along with any applicable Senate or House rules, prior to recording. These laws and rules vary substantially from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

AFTER THE TOWN HALL

1. **Reach out to media, during and after the town hall.** If there's media at the town hall, the people who asked questions should approach them afterward and offer to speak about their concerns. When the event is over, you should engage local reporters on Twitter or by email and offer to provide an in-person account of what happened, as well as your pictures or videos. Example Twitter outreach:

“@reporter I was at Rep. Smith's town hall in Springfield today. Large group asked about Medicare privatization. I have video & happy to chat.”

Note: It's important to make this a public tweet by including the period before the journalist's Twitter handle. Making this public will make the journalist more likely to respond to ensure they get the intel first.

Ensure that the members of your group who are directly affected by specific threats are the ones whose voices are elevated when you contact media.

2. **Share everything.** Post pictures, video, your thoughts about the event, etc., to social media. Tag the MoC's office and encourage others to share widely.