

NYCD16-INDIVISIBLE Town Hall to Resist the Trump Agenda with US Representative Eliot Engel, March 5th 2017.

Opening remarks by Eileen O'Connor

Welcome! My name is Eileen O'Connor. I'm A Yonkers resident, a family nurse practitioner, mother of an amazing young woman, Maeve, and cofounder, with my spouse, Liz de Bethune, of NYCD16-Indivisible.

As a way of collectively embracing the basic tenets that our democracy was founded on, please join us in singing

“ America the Beautiful!”

I, as many of you, was despondent after the election. I felt my entire being wrenched by the real possibility of having our basic democratic principles violated by the likes of Trump, Steve Bannon and their entourage and extremist Republicans.

Our 23 year old daughter, Maeve, wrote this the day after the election:

Yesterday I was nervous but full of hope and excitement for what was to come and what I could do and what we as a generation can do. Of course I still have faith in the resilience and potential in those people I know and love, and those I don't, who have dedicated themselves to fighting systems of oppression, colonialism, white supremacy, heterosexism and patriarchy.

But today I feel betrayed, ashamed, and sick. I feel like my future, and more so the futures of my black and brown friends and family, was just stolen from us. I feel helpless and hopeless and robbed and fearful. I know that America loves racists and rapists more than its poc and its daughters. I know that America hates me and my family. I knew these things already, but to have them declared and celebrated so unashamedly makes me nauseous. I just heard my mothers downstairs talking fearfully about what rights they will have and what rights our family will have come January. I am reminded of nightmares I used to have when I was little about people breaking into our house and killing my parents because they are gay. This is the fear I feel as a woman, a not so cis person, and a queer person from a queer family.

I also know that my white skin, my religious background and my citizenship protects me from the vast majority of the hatred and violence that is about to unfold. To all my black and brown family and friends, Muslims, immigrants, and disabled people: I love you. I will fight with you and for you for the rest of my life. Please be safe in the coming weeks.

White people, this is on us. This culture of grabbing at power through the brutal degradation and oppression of others is distinctly ours, and white people are who voted this man into office. Make no mistake about that. Don't disconnect yourself from them, because you can't. Take responsibility for our legacy in this

country and globally.

I'll post something about keeping on and continuing the fight later. Right now I am dejected, ashamed, hopeless, and frightened.

Well, once a mother always a mother, right?

Liz and I decided we had to DO something, but were not sure what! We reached out to a number of our local politicians several times and tried to get our Democrats to organize a Town Hall meeting to allow people to vent, and support one another. We got responses from two of them. Encouraging US to mobilize.

We then wrote an email to all our friends and neighbor's and invited them to our home on January 7th to put our heads together and come up ideas about moving forward. Meanwhile, we came across the Indivisible Guide, read the workbook, embraced it and its principles.

Fifty people showed up in the middle of a snowstorm! This is when NYCD16 was born!

We are now 600+ people strong.

What we've done so far: In our first two months, NYCD16 has held several general meetings in Yonkers, developed and adopted a governance structure, organized working groups to manage communications, outreach, action, legislative research and town hall organizing, and also has set up teams focusing on issues including healthcare, reproductive rights, immigration, and the environment. We also have a Riverdale sub-group focused on state-level elected officials. We have dozens of engaged volunteers working on all of these efforts and plan to expand to cover other issues of concern, including voting rights, education, inequality, and fighting racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

Our **mission statement** says it clearly:

NYCD16-Indivisible's mission is to encourage and enable constituents of New York's 16th Congressional District, which includes the northern Bronx and lower Westchester, to take political action designed to resist and defeat the extremist Republican and Trump agendas, by engaging our elected officials, particularly our Members of Congress, as well as our local and state officials.

Our guiding principles: Inspired by the Indivisible Guide, and in alignment with a progressive agenda and to preserve our republic's democracy, NYCD16 Indivisible will serve as an organizing home base and an operating conduit for members to take action, while embracing the values of inclusion, tolerance and fairness.

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Have met with and developed a **good working relationship** with our Congressman Elliot Engel and his staff.

Wrote a **petition** signed by 193 people in January asking that the Congressman boycott the Inauguration: he went!

Wrote another petition to the Congressman, titled "Don't SHAKE HIS HAND!", signed by 202 people; He didn't! and made National news for that.

Thank you to all our elected officials here today: LIST

Thank you to representatives of nonprofit groups here today: LIST; if we missed your name stand up and shout out your name.

We wanted to have our Congressman here to speak to what is happening now, especially about our challenged national sovereignty, about hate crimes occurring in our communities, about the fears of immigrants, about losing our health care, and what he and his colleagues are doing in response, **and how we can help**.

We also wanted people from our community to speak out about what is happening, or may happen in regards to the same issues of health care, immigrant lives, civil rights, LGBT people and others, and ask them to direct their comments to what and how the Congressman is doing to help; how can we as an ACTIVATED COMMUNITY can help.

We know that we cannot cover all the issues in today's forum. We see this as the first in a series of Town Hall **meetings around our district to talk about ALL issues of importance**, including the ever evolving status of our national integrity, anti-Semitism, Climate change, Education issues to name but a few.

With that in mind: we wanted to both hear from our representative and from constituents in a balanced manner.

SO,

This is our format for today' event:

A 2 hour program, divided into 2 parts:

The **first hour** will be presentations from Congressman Engel (about 15-20 minutes) updating us about where things stand in our national landscape; telling us what we can all do to support the Resist Trump Agenda.

Our Community Panelists will each speak for about 6-7 minutes. They will describe what is or will happen in our communities in regards to health care, Effect of trump policies on the Muslim American community, Immigrant community, LGBT community.

While they are speaking, please write down questions on the index cards provided to you when you came in. List your topic at the top; and your legible question beneath that.

The Second hour will be questions from the audience, both directly and with that in mind, let me introduce our guests:

New York Congressional District 16 **Congressman Eliot Engel** is the ranking member on the House Foreign Affairs Committee. He also serves on the Energy and Commerce Committee including the Subcommittee on Health, and the Subcommittee on Communications and Technology. He is the founder and Co-Chair of the House Oil and National Security Caucus, which is seeking clean, energy efficient alternatives to America's over-reliance on oil. He also sits on the Gun Violence Prevention Task Force, the Bipartisan Task Force for Combatting Anti-Semitism, the HIV/AIDS Caucus, the Long Island Sound Caucus, and the Animal Protection Caucus, among others.

Dr. Marji Gold is an amazing family doctor and Teacher of Family Medicine residents in the Montefiore Family Medicine Program, in the Bronx. She will speak about health care and reproductive rights.

Arziki Adamu is an American Muslim Yonkers native, community activist and will talk about what is happening in her community.

Dr Nasser Al-Omari, is Yonkers resident, an educator, an Arab American writer and Vice Chair of Yonkers Mayor Spano's Muslim American Advisory Board. He will address Muslim American Concerns.

Professor Vanessa Merton, is Director of Pace University's Elisabeth Haub School of Law Immigration Justice Clinic, which serves the people of the Hudson Valley

Michael Sabatino, is Yonkers City Council Minority Leader and the first openly gay member of Yonkers City Council. He will address LGBT concerns.

Thank you all for your comments and your call to action!

We will now begin the **Second Part of our Program:**

Our NYICD16 Indivisible members are walking around holding index cards in the air. You have written your questions down on your index card; give them back to our members and they will be brought up front, collated by category and read aloud.

For those of you who want to speak directly, we will have 4 hand held mics to speak from. Our NYCD16 Indivisible members are in the aisle, 2 on each side. Line up behind that person if you want to speak.

Now, each person who speaks will have 1 minute to make a statement, ask a question address to one of our panelists. Each person should have this in mind: How can the Congressman help? How can we as a community help? Please speak directly into the mic so that everyone can hear and our recording of the event will be clear. Each panelist will have a minute or two to answer.

Our timer will make this Sound: when _____your time is up. Repeat:

Ok, take a minute to assemble and we will start to read the questions that have been written down.

OK, the first questions:

Wrapping it up:

Many thanks to our Congressman, Eliot Engel for being here with us today. Thank you to our panelists for speaking so eloquently and giving all of us homework!

Thank you to President Flynn and the incredible staff of the College of Mount St Vincent College for providing us with this lovely space.

Most of all, thanks to all who have come today to participate, to listen, to be active in bringing all of us forward. WE are in this for the long haul; we must sustain and nourish each other in the struggle ahead.

The Next NYCD16 Indivisible Meeting is on March 26th at 12:30, at the Yonkers Riverfront Library. I hope to see you all there.

Let's finish by singing "This Land is your Land"! The words are on the back of your program.

All those who helped to organize this event, please stay behind for a debriefing.

Good Day!