



Women. Power. Peace.

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD AT A TOWN HALL



ATTENDING A TOWN HALL

Attending a town hall meeting where your Member of Congress is speaking offers a great opportunity to thank your Member in public, call them to action on an issue, or ask them to take a leadership role. The media are often at these events, and media coverage will help influence your Member and educate the community.

Below are a few tips for effectively making your voice heard at a town hall meeting.

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DURING THE TOWN HALL

1. **Get there early.** Chances are you weren't invited to the meeting and had to dig up the information. There's a reason for that. Strong supporters often arrive early, which might mean you'll get turned away at the door. Try to arrive an hour beforehand to increase your chances of getting in.
2. **Sit by the microphone.** If there is one set up, plant yourself near it so you don't end up on the back of the question line. If other people start lining up to ask questions before they are invited to, you should also.
3. **If you come with friends, don't all sit together.** There is strength in numbers, even perceived numbers. If you are literally all over the place, the opposition will feel like you were figuratively all over the place.
4. **Come with questions written down on index cards.** Some Members will try to screen the questions by taking them in writing. If you have yours all ready to go when you get there, you have a far better chance of getting it read.



PREPARATION TIPS

Do your homework. Find out from the local office when and where your Members will be speaking.

Prepare questions ahead of time. Be confident, considerate and persistent about getting an answer to your question.

Familiarize yourself with your Members of Congress. You can find information about your Members through web searches, or by contacting the WAND DC office: (202) 544-5055.

Designate a note taker to jot down information and promises made by the Member.



SPEAKING AT A TOWN HALL

Below are several ways to make sure your voice is heard at a town hall meeting!

- 1. If there is no chance to ask questions, ask them anyway.** The latest tactic by Members of Congress who don't want to answer tough questions is to essentially filibuster with a PowerPoint that is full of rhetoric and can be misleading rather than take questions from the audience. Raise your hand during these if there is an appropriate place for a question. Question the information being presented, especially if it is not backed up by facts. If the Member doesn't respond, stand up and ask the question anyway.
- 2. Ask questions that tell the story.** Often Members of Congress will read the written question out loud. So write down questions that make your point. Instead of asking them why they voted yes or no on an issue, ask them to explain why they voted in a way that negatively affected their constituents or contradicted another one of their votes.
- 3. Have a few fun facts at your fingertips.** Facts will help support your argument when you ask a question and using hard facts makes it more difficult for Members to give non-answers or avoid answering.
- 4. Don't let yourself be interrupted.** Protagonists have a lot practice booing and hissing over the sound of your voice. Don't be surprised if someone starts yelling at you mid-question, but don't stop asking it. If you have something to say, by all means, keep talking. You have every right to ask your question. You have every right to be heard. And remember to extend others the same courtesy by not interrupting them.
- 5. Stay on message.** Don't get distracted or angry if you feel your question is not adequately addressed. Be persistent in repeating the question and asking for a response.
- 6. Refuse to take a non-answer for an answer.** Ask your question. Then wait for the response. If you don't get an actual answer to the question, say so, while standing up. Don't be afraid to say "Congressman, that doesn't answer my question," then repeat it. Remember, these people work for you!
- 7. If you are angry, be angry.** No one is advocating aggression, violence, or anything like that. But a lot of us really are angry about the state of our union and the actions of our representatives. You have the right to be angry with your elected officials. Don't be afraid to let it show a little.

For additional information about attending town halls, contact WAND at peace@wand.org.

AFTERWARDS

Seek out media after the meeting to talk about your issues if they were not covered.

Seek out the Member (or staff) after the meeting to introduce yourself and to follow up on your question. You can also ask your question if you were not able to during the meeting.

Leave the event with a clear plan to follow up with staff.