

## OPPORTUNITY 1

### TOWN HALLS/LISTENING SESSIONS

MoCs regularly hold local “town halls” or public listening sessions throughout their districts or state. Tea Partiers used these events to great effect – both to directly pressure their MoCs and to attract media to their cause.

#### PREPARATION

1. **Find out when your MoC’s next public town hall event is.** Sometimes these are announced well in advance, and 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, and get commitments from members to attend.** Distribute to all of them whatever information you have on your MoC’s voting record, as well as the prepared questions.
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. Prepare 5-10 of these questions and hand them out to your group ahead of the meeting. Example question:

“I and many district families in Springfield rely on Medicare. I don’t think we should be rationing health care for seniors, and the plan to privatize Medicare will create serious financial hardship for seniors who can’t afford it. You haven’t gone on the record opposing this. Will you commit here and now to vote no on Bill X to cut Medicare?”



#### 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 something similar.
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. No staffer in their right mind wants to look like they're physically intimidating a constituent, so they will back off. 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 the video footage you collected. 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 reach out to media.

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