

INDIVISIBLE

HOW TO STAND INDIVISIBLE AT TOWN HALLS

Congressional recess is back April 8-23. Congressional recess is a special time. It's when Members of Congress (MoCs) come back to their home districts for extended periods of time to meet with their constituents and hold public events. These recess periods are when your MoCs prefer to hold town halls, ribbon cuttings, and otherwise garner good local press for themselves.

As in February, the upcoming recess is a great opportunity for your group to remind your MoCs that they need to stand up for you—and that means standing up and speaking out against the Trump agenda.

During the first recess period, thousands of you showed up to ask your MoCs hard, vital questions about whether they'll resist the Trump agenda. And your hard work is already paying off. You defeated TrumpCare: the Republican plan, seven years in the making, to strip healthcare away from 24 million Americans just three months into the Congressional calendar. No one thought we could do it—but you called, you showed up, and, ultimately, you stopped TrumpCare from becoming law. But we aren't done yet. We're just getting started.

Below are some expanded tips and strategies on how to maximize this opportunity to influence your MoCs. Keep it up. This is working. We can win.

SUMMARY

Prepare for your town hall.

1. Find out when and where your MoC's next Town Hall will be held.
2. Tell everyone you can—including us—about the event.
3. Hold a group meeting dedicated to preparing for the Town Hall.
4. Develop a list of questions your group will ask your MoC during the event.
5. Create your own media strategy for raising the profile of your Town Hall.

Be strategic at your town hall.

1. Get there early and get organized.
2. Make your group's presence known immediately.
3. Tell your stories to your MoC.
4. Be polite yet persistent.
5. Show your approval or disapproval as appropriate.
6. Record everything.

Get back to work after the town hall.

1. Reach out to the press—and us!
2. Share all of your images and videos.
3. Thank your MoC—and tell them that one Town Hall is not enough.

PREPARE

This section describes how to prepare for a town hall in five simple steps. First, find out when and where the Town Hall will be held. Second, advertise it. Third, hold a group meeting to prepare for it. Fourth, develop a set of questions that you want your MoC to answer at the Town Hall. Finally, create your own media strategy to get press coverage for it.

1. **Find out when your MoC's next public town hall event is being held.** Sometimes these events are announced well in advance. But often MoCs will delay announcing the specific time, date, or location to try to suppress turnout. Though town halls and similar forums are technically "public," they are often only announced through channels that are friendly to your MoC (e.g., a Chamber of Commerce listserv email). If you can't find announcements about your MoC's next town hall, use www.contactingcongress.org to speak directly with a staff member. When you call, be friendly and say to the staffer, "Hi, I'm [your name] and I live at [your address]. I'd like to know when [your MoC's name's] next town hall forum will be." If they don't know, ask to be added to the email list they use to announce events.



I CAN'T FIND ANY INFORMATION ABOUT MY MOC'S PUBLIC EVENTS. NOW WHAT?

The Indivisible website is a great place to register or check for town halls and other events Indivisible groups in your area are planning during recess. If your MoC is being evasive about when and where they are holding public events, consider registering for email updates from sources that are friendly to your MoC (e.g., your local Chamber of Commerce, state or local Republican or Democratic Parties, and other civic and business interest groups).

2. **Tell everyone you can about the upcoming town hall.** In addition to registering the event on the Indivisible website, create a Facebook event and ask your members to invite their networks. National press outlets use this kind of information to decide which events to cover.

You should also draft a [press advisory](#) listing the event's details and send it to every local member of the press you can find. Be shameless—email it to print and television reporters, then tag them when you post the advisory to Twitter. Many of them welcome tips like this and go out of their way to make sure their email addresses and Twitter profiles are public and easy to find. You can find more tips for engaging with press in [this helpful resource](#).

3. **Hold a group meeting to prepare for the town hall.** This is a chance for you to identify your best public speakers, to determine which questions you'll ask your MoC, and to develop a plan for the day of the event. Here are some principles and ideas to cover in your town hall planning meeting:

- » **Your job isn't to convince your MoC of anything.** It is to create the political conditions necessary to force them into a new position—or to replace them. This is a marathon, not a sprint and every mark against them will matter—especially footage of them flailing in a town hall with you and your group.
- » **You are storytellers and your neighbors are your audience.** Be honest. Be vulnerable. Your story matters, and you deserve the chance to share it. For instance, if you're a small business owner who wasn't able to afford health insurance before the ACA exchanges opened in 2014, tell your MoC what it was like before you had insurance, what you've gained from it, and what you're afraid might happen if they vote to repeal it, or if Trump takes administrative actions to undermine the law.

Sharing stories can be tough, especially if it's very personal—so to get ready, you might want to practice with fellow members of your group or write down key points that you know you want to make.

- » **Your MoC is mostly just equipped to parrot talking points.** Many MoCs are surprisingly bad at relating to or engaging with people. If you push them out of their comfort zone and off their talking points—if you force them to engage with real stories and with pointed questions—they will go in all kinds of directions.
- » **You win when you create political pressure on your MoC to break from the Trump agenda.** You also win when you create political support for them to do the right thing. Your pressure can force a bad MoC to make a good decision, like opposing repeal of the ACA. It can also encourage a good MoC to make a great one, like sponsoring legislation to compel the release of Trump's tax returns.
- » **Know your strengths.** It is totally OK to show up and be a supportive body at the town hall—in fact, the success of your group's event depends on hundreds if not thousands of your members doing just that. Not everyone has to speak or lead—just being there is a huge step.

4. **Before the town hall, work together to prepare questions ahead of time for your group to ask.** Your questions should be sharp and unequivocal—make them commit to a position or give a direct yes or no response to your question. If possible, include information on the MoC's record, votes they've taken, or statements they've made. Gathering this information should be part of your preparation for the town hall.

Your questions should focus on a limited number of issues to maximize impact. You should push your MoCs on the issues that matter most to you, but [here](#) are the topics that Indivisible will be prioritizing producing materials on to help you prepare.

5. **Create your own media strategy for the event.** [Check out this guide](#) for a detailed plan on what to do. Short version: find out which local reporters have covered your MoC and reach out to them—make sure they capture your perspective when they cover the town hall. Tell them why you and your group are attending the town hall. Also, you should have a unique hashtag for your town hall so that we and other reporters can easily find it on Twitter (e.g., #CottonTownHall). Take all the photos and videos that you can, then use that hashtag on Twitter so that we can help spread the word about all your great work.

AT THE TOWN HALL

This section describes how to maximize the impact of your Town Hall in six simple steps. First, get there early and get organized. Second, make your group's presence known immediately. Third, tell your stories to your MoC. Fourth, be polite but persistent. Fifth, show your approval or disapproval of your MoC's answers as appropriate. Finally, record and share everything.

A NOTE ON SAFETY AND PRIVILEGE

We do not yet know how Trump supporters will respond to organized shows of opposition, but we have seen enough to be very concerned that minorities will be targeted or singled out. Plan your actions to ensure that no one is asked to take on a role that they are not comfortable with—especially those roles that call for semi-confrontational behavior—and be mindful of the fact that not everyone is facing an equal level of threat. Members of your group who enjoy more privilege should think carefully about how they can ensure that they are using their privilege to support other members of the group. If you are concerned about potential law enforcement intimidation, consider downloading your state's version of the ACLU Mobile Justice app to ensure that any intimidating behavior is captured on film. Please familiarize yourself with your state and local laws that govern recording, along with any applicable Senate or House rules, prior to recording video or audio. These laws and rules vary substantially from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

1. **Get there early, meet up, and get organized.** The venue will usually open its doors an hour or so before the event. As many of you as possible should arrive as early as possible to begin distributing signs, handouts of the questions and speaker list, and reviewing your ground rules.

Then, head into the venue and spread out. It may even be helpful to have a floor plan of the venue in-hand so that you can direct your members to certain areas as they come in to prevent clustering together. This is important, because if your MoC's staff sense a bloc of opposition from one side of the room, they'll simply ignore it.

2. **Make your Indivisible presence known early.** Town halls are public events, and a chance to demonstrate the strength of your group to the MoC, to the local media, and to your fellow town hall attendees. Take advantage of this moment:

- » **Start with the Pledge of Allegiance.** Seriously. This isn't grade school, though sometimes your MoC will act like it is. But you are engaging in a vital civic act—you're meeting with your Representative or Senator to discuss the most important issues to you and your community. So start your town hall with a public recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. When you reach the end and it's time to say "Indivisible, with liberty and justice for all", let the crowd know how strong your group is by shouting "Indivisible" in unison. Get this on video, and spread the word—for instance [here's an example from a South Carolina town](#).

[hall](#). This simple act of citizenship is also a powerful, symbolic act of solidarity—and it will resonate within your town hall and beyond.

- » **Proselytize the Indivisible way.** This is an opportunity to show strength and evangelize. When introducing yourself to other attendees or to the MoC, let them know which local group you're a part of, and what your group stands for. For local attendees, you might be able to recruit new group members into your group. For the MoC, you'll demonstrate the support your group has in the community, and that will give you more power the next time you call or visit their district office.
- » **Come ready with your group's swag.** Got Indivisible signs, buttons, shirts, fliers, or other info for your group? This is the chance to use them. Visuals are powerful for your MoC, and they're also powerful for local press—if you want to end up on the evening news (and you do), think how you can create a striking image demonstrating your Indivisible group's strength. Note, however, that if your MoC is hostile to you, folks wearing swag are unlikely to get called on. If this is the case, make sure that the members of your group who want to ask questions are not easily identified.

3. **Get ready to weigh in!** After the MoC opens up the floor, everyone in your group who's ready to speak should raise their hands.

- » **Ask your questions.** If you've come as an organized group, you can start to go through the list of questions that you've already prepared together.
- » **Tell your stories.** Personal stories have the power to disrupt a MoC's normal procedure for interacting with constituents. Your MoC may be prepared with their own set of alternative facts on health care or the Muslim ban, but there's no way to deflect or dodge when faced with a powerful personal story.

KATI MCFARLAND OF OZARK INDIVISIBLE TO SENATOR TOM COTTON

"My family has been in the Ozarks since the 1800s. We are historically a Republican family, we are a farming family, we're an NRA family, and we're a military family. Now, aside from inheriting their patriotism and their work ethic, I also unfortunately inherited an incurable connective tissue disorder called Ehler-Danlos Syndrome, also known as EDS.

EDS weakens my heart and my veins, it paralyzes my stomach, it affects and weakens my immune system. I qualify for Medicare, but it's useless for me since there are only two doctors within 500 miles of me who are familiar with EDS and accept Medicare.

Without the coverage for pre-existing conditions, I will die. That is not hyperbole. I will die. Without the protections against lifetime coverage caps, I will die. Without the Obamacare or ACA exchange health care plan that I will be able to purchase after my Cobra coverage expires when I turn 26 this coming Sunday, I will die.

You have talked a lot about exercising caution when it comes to repealing the ACA--that it has to be repeal and replace. But it doesn't seem to me that you or anyone in your party is doing much to ensure the replacement part. **So my specific question is, You talk a lot about the repeal, but you haven't offered any specifics on the replacement. Will you commit, today, to replacement protections for Arkansans like me who will die or lose their quality of life in the same way that you have committed to repealing the ACA?"**

4. **Be polite but persistent, and demand real answers.** MoCs are very good at deflecting or dodging questions they don't want to answer. Don't let them get away with moving on before they've answered your question. If the MoC dodges, ask a follow-up question. If they aren't giving you real answers, then call them out for it. Here are a few tips:
- » **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?" Use the crowd to your advantage: ask them to cheer or stand in solidarity if they want the MoC to answer your question before moving on.
 - » **Keep the pressure on.** After one member of your group finishes a question, 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. If the MoC moves on to you without addressing the previous question, don't be afraid to restate it and demand an answer to your friend's query.
 - » **Anticipate their efforts to dismiss or undermine you.** Some MoCs will try to undercut your legitimacy by claiming that you or other members of the audience have been bussed in or are paid protesters. This would be hilarious if it weren't so offensive. It's also easily disproven. Don't be afraid to tell your MoC where you work, what neighborhood you live in, what church you attend, or what precinct you vote in as a preface to your question.
5. **Show your approval or disapproval of your MoCs answers in the town hall.** A key part of hosting a town hall is providing your MoC with evidence of exactly how deep the opposition to Trump's agenda runs in their district. You can do that in a lot of creative ways:
- » **Create a set of coordinated signs.** During the first recess period, many of groups came with hundreds of identical signs to their town halls and put them to great use. Some used plain red and green signs to show support and displeasure. Others used "thumbs-up" and "thumbs-down" signs to do the same. Whatever mass sign you decide to use, know that it will create a powerful image and serve as a powerful tactic for throwing your MoC off their game. Be creative.
 - » **Develop a set of chants that can be paired with your signs to amplify your approval or disapproval.** During the first recess period, many of our groups chanted "[Do your job](#)" when their MoC tried to dodge a question or ignore someone's comment. We'd also suggest "Do No Harm" when your member gives a bad answer on the ACA. And when an MoC tries to dodge a clear yes or no question, chanting "Yes or No" makes it harder for them to get away with it.
- Remember: be passionate in expressing your positions, but don't shout down your MoC. Keep in mind that one of your goals in attending a town hall is to get your MoC to give on the record statements about issues that matter to you and your group. They can't do that if no one can hear them.

6. **Record everything!** Assign several people in your group to use a 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. These laws and rules vary substantially from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.



A NOTE ON SIGNS

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. Bringing small, plain signs that can be displayed in unison to express displeasure or approval--and then easily tucked away--is the best tactic for this kind of event.

AFTER THE TOWN HALL

This section describes what to do after your Town Hall in three simple steps. First, [reach out to the press](#). Second, share all of your images and videos. Finally, thank your MoC—and tell them that one town hall is not enough.

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. Also, always tag us on Twitter ([@IndivisibleTeam](#)) and send pictures, videos, and everything else to us at [stories@indivisibleguide.com](#). We'll amplify all of your great work and help you get national press attention—something your MoC desperately wants to avoid.
3. **Tell your MoC—and the press—that one town hall is not enough.** Showing up to listen to your constituents questions and concerns once every few months is not acceptable. MoCs block off days at a time to meet with campaign contributors, industry lobbyists, and other special interests—they owe you at least as much time. Your MoCs should listen to their district, not just their party, and the only way they can do that well is by spending a lot of time with you.