

A Guide to Town Hall Meetings

WHAT ARE TOWN HALL MEETINGS AND WHY DO THEY MATTER?

When the U.S. House and U.S. Senate are in recess, members of Congress will spend a great deal of time working in their district offices, meeting with constituents one-on-one and hosting town hall meetings. A town hall meeting is an excellent forum for a community to come together and ask questions about policy issues that affect everyone. These meetings are cornerstone activities of our democracy and are one of the few forums still available in modern politics that allow an open, direct conversation between elected officials and their constituents.

Most town hall meetings occur in August, although they can and do occur at other times when Congress is not in session. This guide will help answer any questions you may have about how to prepare to attend a town hall meeting, what to expect at these events and how to best communicate your questions or messages to your legislator.

HOW DO I FIND OUT IF MY MEMBER OF CONGRESS IS HOSTING A TOWN HALL MEETING?

- The best way to find out is to sign up for your congressman or congresswoman's e-newsletter, which will announce their public meetings and local appearances.
- Many legislators have migrated to other forums such as online town halls or town hall meetings via conference lines, called "tele-town halls." While the face-to-face dynamic has diminished, this direct line of communication to your legislator is still worth participating in.

HOW SHOULD I PREPARE TO ADDRESS MY ELECTED OFFICIAL?

- Know the issues. There are a range of resources available for you to review:
 - **Nuclear Matters Communications.** Every few weeks we will update you via email about the most relevant and important legislative issues. Take this information with you to meetings with your legislators.
 - **Advocacy Toolkit.** Available on the Nuclear Matters website, we have prepared for you talking points on each of the core issues surrounding nuclear energy.
- Do your homework on the legislator. Make sure you know a little about your legislator before you attend the meeting.
- Know the meeting format and location. Visit the legislator's website or call the office to learn more. Once you arrive at the meeting, see if there is a process for asking a question or making a statement at the meeting.

NUCLEAR MATTERS

WHAT HAPPENS ONCE THE MEETING STARTS?

- Prepare your question or comment in advance. Public speaking can seem intimidating, so write down your question or comment to focus on what you'd like to ask or convey.
- Be clear, concise, polite and professional. You are there as an advocate of nuclear power, so the Nuclear Matters talking points will help you to hone your message. It's best to weave your introduction into your question or comment, if possible. Start with who you are, where you work and your reason for being a nuclear advocate. You are most effective in your advocacy efforts if you are reasonable in your tone and request, even if the legislator disagrees with you.
- Encourage a response from your legislator. Sometimes legislators feel put on the spot or are not able to give you a specific answer at the time of the meeting. If he or she cannot give you a response, express thanks for the opportunity to speak and follow up with his or her staff after the meeting.

WHAT DO I NEED TO DO ONCE THE MEETING IS OVER?

- Follow up. It is appropriate and encouraged to contact your legislator's office and thank them for holding the town hall and for the opportunity to speak. This is also the time to follow up on any unanswered questions or to share again any fact sheets or materials you want your legislator's office to have.
- Share your story. By reporting back to Nuclear Matters on your participation at a town hall meeting, we can help reinforce the message you delivered and assist with any necessary follow-up to maximize your efforts. Furthermore, we want to be able to share your story of advocacy with other Nuclear Matters members! Email info@nuclearmatters.com with your story of advocacy to encourage others to do the same.