



Atheists. Agnostics. Humanists. Americans.

Attending your First Town Hall

Members of Congress hold Town Hall meetings throughout the year to hear directly from constituents in their district or state. They are usually held at a local community center or business and are open to the public. Town Halls often include a short update from your member of Congress about what is happening in Washington D.C., followed by short individual meetings or a question-and-answer period.

Finding your Town Hall:

- Touch base with the Secular Coalition for America's lobbying team in Washington, D.C. to let them know you are interested in attending a Town Hall. We will let you know if there are any events we have flagged in your area.
- Although our lobbying team will keep track of local events held by legislators, it is important to follow your members of Congress on social media and subscribe to their newsletters to keep up to date.
- You can also call your legislators' offices periodically to ask for updates on local events.

Arrive Early:

- Town Halls tend to get crowded very quickly, so arriving early will guarantee that you get in and get a good seat.
- Find a staffer before the event starts and let them know you want to ask your legislator a question. Often staffers will take a count or take note of any constituents who want to ask a question.
- You may not always get to ask a question. There are many moving parts that go into a Town Hall meeting: the legislator's schedule may run late, there may be too many people in attendance, or the style of your legislator's Town Hall may not leave much time for constituent questions. Do not be disappointed if you don't get the opportunity to ask a question. You will learn about the general opinion in your district just by listening and talking with other constituents in attendance.

Asking your legislator a question: Asking your legislator a question is your opportunity to address your legislator face-to-face, bring visibility to the secular community, and get them on the record on a question.

- Our lobbying team in Washington, D.C. will send you the most updated materials and sample questions for your Town Hall
- Introduce yourself as a secular constituent. You can describe yourself in whatever way you feel most comfortable, but it is important to identify yourself as part of the large and growing secular population

in America, so that lawmakers recognize that we are a strong and united constituency. Here are some examples of how you can identify yourself in the movement:

- As a volunteer for the Secular Coalition for America (or one of our 19 member organizations)
 - As a member of your local secular group
 - Identify yourself with the words you feel best describe you, like “humanist,” “atheist,” “agnostic,” or “nontheist”, or identify as a constituent who supports the separation of church and state.
 - Make sure you state that you are a constituent and that you live in your legislators district or state. You can do this by stating what town you live in and how long you have lived there when you introduce yourself.
 - Here’s an example: “My name is Jane Doe, I have lived in Blanktown for 25 years, and I am an atheist.”
- Be polite. Using a hostile tone or phrasing your question rudely will not help your cause with your legislator or the constituent audience.
 - Avoid phrasing your question to have a “yes or no” answer or require an on-the-spot commitment. You are welcome to add your personal story to provide context for your question, **but keep it open-ended and stick to the topic**. Here are a few examples of correct phrasing:
 - DO: “Do you agree that all nonprofits, including churches, should not be allowed to endorse political candidates?”
 - DON’T: “Do you support the Johnson Amendment?”
 - DO: “Would your religious beliefs influence public policy as they relate to access to reproductive health care?”
 - DON’T: “Are you pro-choice?”

Stay for the whole event:

- If you aren’t given the chance to ask your question during the meeting, or you have additional questions, many Members of Congress will stick around after the meeting.
- Connect with a staffer. Members often have a busy schedule and have to leave immediately after the meeting is over, however, one or two members of their staff usually stays to hear out all constituent questions and concerns. Be sure to get their business card and give them yours if you have one, then follow up with an email as soon as you get home so that they will remember meeting you.
- Network! There may be other groups or individuals at your Town Hall who feel the same way you do. If another person in the audience asks a question that shows they may be a secular constituent, don’t hesitate to have a conversation.

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