The Fray: Faso will hold town hall in Ulster County this month

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Rep. John Faso announced Friday that he’ll hold a town hall gathering in Esopus at the end of the August congressional recess, a moderated event at which attendance will be limited to 200 people.

The forum follows a tumultuous political season in which other Republican congressional members have faced heated criticism at similar gatherings in their districts over their party's plans to repeal and replace Obamacare. Faso said on Friday that Move Forward New York, a liberal activist group, had asked to hold a joint town hall with him in May, and that he had accepted. Both he and Move Forward each will distribute 70 tickets in advance, ensuring a mixed audience. The remaining 60 tickets will be given out at the door or a first come, first serve basis.

The event is scheduled for 6:30-8 p.m. on Aug. 31 at Esopus Town Hall. Doors open at 6 p.m. The moderators are Gerald Benjamin, a political science professor and director of The Benjamin Center at SUNY New Paltz; and Debra Clinton of Move Forward New York.

“In May, some folks from Move Forward New York approached me about doing a joint town hall event to hear from constituents in an organized and civil forum,” Faso said in a press release Friday. “Since then, our offices have been collaborating to plan and hammer out details for the event, and I am very pleased to say that we have this event scheduled for August 31 in Esopus.”

Faso, a Kinderhook Republican whose district includes Ulster and Sullivan counties, is expected to speak for 10 minutes and then take audience questions. Attendees will submit written questions and be called on to read them, with the two moderators taking turns choosing the questions. To request a ticket from Move Forward New York, email mfnny19@gmail.com. To get one from Faso’s
The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee had announced last week it was targeting Faso and 24 other Republicans with a digital campaign that aims to drive Google searches to a website that demands Faso hold a town hall-style meeting.

The Google search advertisements will run from through Sept. 8 and be targeted to people’s locations and attached to a wide array of search terms relating to the lawmaker, district, health care and town halls, according to the DCCC.

The advertisements for Faso will take people to Fasotownhallwatch.com. The website says at the top “404 no town halls found” and has a countdown clock to when the DCCC says the last town hall-style public meeting was held. It also has links to news articles or opinion pieces about Faso, an invitation to email Faso’s campaign to demand a town hall meeting, and links to tweet or post on Facebook.

Chris McKenna and James Nani

**Activist wields box of ziti to fight gas infrastructure**

Pasta has became the prop of choice in an ongoing fight by activists to try to stop a natural gas power plant and associated infrastructure from going online in Orange County.

Pramilla Malick, an environmental activist with the group Protect Orange County, submitted a box of ziti pasta to the state Department of Environmental Conservation during a public hearing on Aug. 2 for a proposed natural gas pipeline that Millennium Pipeline Company wants to build.

The DEC held the hearing at the Paramount Theatre in Middletown. The 7.8-mile, $57.3 million pipeline would supply natural gas to a $900 million natural gas-fired power plant being built in Wawayanda by Competitive Power Ventures. The DEC has yet to award Millennium a key water quality permit that would allow it to begin construction. The power plant is due to go online next year and would lack a permanent power supply without Millennium’s pipeline.

Speaking at a press conference that saw heavy turnout by environmental activists
and concerned residents, Malick said the ziti represents what she called the
“corrupt” process to approve the power plant.

“This ziti represents that we know that the approval process was corrupted,”
Malick said. “One person has already plead guilty to bribery, we don’t need to
know more about this.”

Federal prosecutors have said that “ziti” was a code word used during a
corruption scheme involving a former CPV executive. Prosecutors said
beginning in 2010, Peter Galbraith Kelly Jr., who oversaw external affairs for
CPV, worked to ingratiate himself with Joe Percoco, a former top aide to Gov.
Andrew Cuomo and Todd Howe, a former Albany consultant who pleaded
guilty in September 2016 and is cooperating with federal prosecutors.

Prosecutors said Howe looked to Percoco to influence the former state
operations director to bolster the proposed CPV power plant. In emails between
Howe and Percoco, they refer to bribe payments as “ziti,” an apparent homage to
the television show “The Sopranos,” prosecutors said. Kelly is accused of
providing $287,000 in bribes. Activists have seized on that criminal case as a
reason to stop the power plant and the infrastructure needed to allow it to go
online.

CPV has said the federal case centers on activities that are unrelated to its plant’s
permitting process, and that charges don’t call that process or plant permits into
question.

Activists went up to Albany on Thursday to host a rally and call on Cuomo to
stop the process for the pipeline and the power plant. They were asked to bring
boxes of ziti as a rallying cry. Malick word a ziti necklace around her neck.

“Our message to Cuomo,” the invitation said. “Take back the ziti and give our
children their air, water, and future back.”

James Nani

Maloney plans three-day fundraising “retreat”
For big-dollar campaign donors, this has got to sound better than a rubber-chicken dinner in D.C.

Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney is inviting supporters to what amounts to a destination wedding for the congressional fundraising world: a three-day “retreat” in his Hudson Valley district in October, in the midst of leaf-peeping season.

An early announcement for the Cold Spring Democrat’s “Inaugural Hudson Valley Retreat” gives only the dates and the name of the boutique hotel, restaurant and banquet hall in Beacon that apparently will serve as the home base from which guests will take regional excursions. Tickets to the Oct. 14-16 sojourn at the Roundhouse Beacon cost $2,500 a person, just under the $2,700 individual contribution limit for congressional races.

Maloney, who’s serving his third term in Congress, had $2.6 million in his campaign account as of June 30 and has no announced challengers yet for 2018. He represents New York’s 18th Congressional District, which includes all of Orange and Putnam counties and parts of Dutchess and Westchester.

Chris McKenna