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Faso faces constituents in Port Ewen

by [Hugh Reynolds](#) / September 1, 2017 / 3 comments



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(Photos by Phyllis McCabe)

A day short of eight months in office, Rep. John Faso faced constituents in a rare local town hall-style appearance in Port Ewen last night.

Under a carefully negotiated program, 70 seats in Esopus Town Hall were allocated to the pro-

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last year, and an equal number of local Republicans and Faso supporters. Sixty seats were allocated to the general public.

Dr. Gerald Benjamin, a SUNY New Paltz professor and dean emeritus who's now a college associate vice president who endorsed Faso in 2016, was one moderator. Debra Clinton, a Move Forward founder, the other. Clinton is principal of Marlboro Middle School.

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The questioning was decidedly one-sided with Faso being challenged on a cornucopia of major federal issues. Healthcare and immigration were most prominently mentioned. Faso seemed most passionate about Medicaid reform in New York, a cause he championed to negligible effect during 16 years as a minority party state assemblyman from Kinderhook. “Legislating state issues from Washington is not your job,” Sue Sullivan told him, prompting Faso to launch a lengthy defense of his position. Sullivan is one of eight currently seeking the Democratic nomination to run against Faso next year.

The crowd was orderly for the most part, reflecting the “civil discourse” Faso had asked for in his ten minutes of opening remarks. Occasional catcalls and hisses were heard from the Move Forward section. Republicans were quiet for the most part.

Subjects were limited by a combination of long questions proceeded by statements by most of the dozen speakers and Faso's detailed responses explaining the complexity of issues and his votes and positions. “He's a policy wonk,” moderator Benjamin said in introducing Faso. He said he meant it as a compliment.



Faso, whose demeanor rarely changed during the two-hour session, seemed aware of his propensity to stem-wind. “I’ll make my answers shorter so we can take more questions,” he quipped as the clock approached adjournment time.

Half the eight Democratic candidates seeking to run against Faso next year were in attendance, but only Sullivan of Plattekill addressed the congressman. Among other things, Sullivan asked Faso “when are you going to stand up to those hurtful soundbites” from President Trump. Faso replied to her and other critics that he has opposed Trump on any number of issues. Sullivan gave Faso an “F.” Also there were candidates Jeff Beals, Steven Brisee and David Clegg.

Security was evident with bags and contents of pockets checked at the door by police. Half a dozen uniformed officers from the state police and sheriff’s office manned the perimeter of the meeting room. There were no incidents.

Defending his having declined numerous invitations to town hall meetings since the beginning of this year, Faso noted that he had held more than 400 separate meetings with constituents since January. In May, he spoke at a forum organized by the New York StateWide Senior Action Council. Attendance at the hour-long session was limited to those who signed up in advance; attendees were asked to write down their questions which were then vetted by StateWide staff before being presented to Faso. Thursday’s meeting was more open-ended.



Faso critics have been calling for him to present himself at town hall meetings since Move Forward organized a rally in Kingston in January, which Faso did not attend. That issue was not directly raised during Thursday's session, though Faso was questioned about accessibility and transparency.



Asked by a reporter before the two-hour question-and-answer session why he hadn't held a meeting sooner, Faso replied that when he took office as the 19th District congressman in January "the country was already hyper-polarized" and that he didn't want to "add to the foment."

Faso said he was satisfied with the turnout and crowd comportment at Thursday's session. He

told several speakers that “we’ll have to agree to disagree,” but seemed to welcome discourse.

“It would be a pretty dull thing if everyone agreed all the time,” he said. “If so, we wouldn’t get crowds like this.” He said afterward he thought the meeting “went well” and that he’d be willing to hold more town hall meetings with constituents.

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Linda Volk September 1, 2017 at 3:47 pm

Glad you pointed out the behavior of the crybaby libs. Also glad you mentioned who organized the past "town halls" and why Faso didn't attend. They were staged against him. He was right not to attend until a more mainstream opportunity.



Susan September 2, 2017 at 6:58 am

Liberals are not crybabies. They are trying to prevent the Trump Administration's willful destruction of Medicaid and Medicare and access under the Affordable Care Act. The issues at stake for most Americans are extremely serious. Faso was elected by some, but not all in this district, therefore he needs to account for his legislative actions he has taken on behalf of all citizens in the 19th district, not just the privileged few. He should be holding Town Hall meetings on a regular basis and orchestrated events.



Truthtim September 4, 2017 at 9:29 am

"Move Forward New York, a group Faso said had "vigorously opposed his candidacy last year""

Really Mr. Faso?

The group had not been formed until AFTER the election!

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