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Hugh Reynolds

## Hugh Reynolds: Faso meets his makers

by [Hugh Reynolds](#) / September 8, 2017 / 2 comments



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As the columnist watches closely, U.S. Rep. John Faso answers a media question at the town hall last week.

(photo by Phyllis McCabe)

I don't think Congressman **John Faso** changed any minds at his long-delayed town hall meeting with constituents last week in Port Ewen. If anybody was listening, and we listened very carefully at the media table near the front of the Esopus Town Hall meeting room, they might have learned a few things.

Faso is a smooth operator. This doesn't necessarily mean slippery or evasive, as some critics contended, though he was that and more on occasion. I thought he handled himself pretty well, given the tenor of the questions from a group he said "campaigned against me in the last election."

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There were few easy questions and no easy answers.

Faso was taken to task for voting for a \$1.6 billion appropriation to build a wall between Mexico and the United States. While pointing out that some of the money was going for things other than bricks, mortar, barbed wire and gun towers, Faso explained that the wall was part of an \$880 billion military appropriation bill. In typical this-and-that fashion, Faso said he didn't oppose the wall, but wasn't in favor of building a barrier in "every cranny" along the thousand-mile Mexican border. The point, when he finally got to it, was that final bills contain numerous elements, some of which legislators might oppose and some of which they favor. In the end, they get one vote regardless.

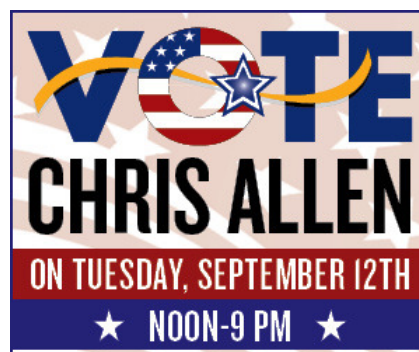
I thought the moderators, **Gerry Benjamin** of SUNY New Paltz and Move Forward's **Debra Clinton**, could have done a better job of limiting self-serving statements and directing questioners actually to ask questions. At the same time, they could have tried to limit some of Faso's wonk-like explanations.

The audience submitted over 100 written questions, including some duplications. The moderators got to a dozen over an 80-minute period.

One questioner did try rein in the loquacious congressman. "Yes, or no, Congressman?" he said of his question, after Faso had taken off to left field, or is it right field for Conservatives? "Please, Congressman," the man interrupted. "Yes or no."

"Yes," said Faso with a laugh, before launching into chapter and verse.

Faso wasn't entirely outnumbered. As negotiated, something unique to these kinds of events, the anti-Faso Move Forward got 70 tickets, Faso supporters an equal number. Sixty presumed neutrals were admitted to fill the 200-seat quota.



The Move Forward contingent, strategically placed at Faso's left as he faced the audience, was energetic, enthusiastic and well-informed. Faso picks sat on their hands all night, except when the congressman hailed the appointment of Supreme Court Justice **Neil Gorsuch** (last April). Move Forward hissed and booed, an odd reaction for a group named Move Forward.

Move on, folks; Gorsuch, 50 on Aug. 29, has a lifetime appointment.

I'm no fan of planted questions, but might the Faso crowd have tossed up just one softball, just one? Someone could have wished him a happy birthday, for instance. The well-preserved congressman turned 65 last month.

To his credit, Faso did not take the opportunity to brag about what he's done during the first third of his 24-month term. His opponents would only have hissed more.

### The human side

Faso was banged for his record of voting "87.8 percent" of the time with **President Trump**, which he disputed. A Republican congressman siding with a Republican president most of the time isn't news. It's news when he doesn't. Faso cited a few examples. As in last year's campaign, Faso kept The Donald at arm's length.



There is a human side to the man, portrayed as he is as an unfeeling ogre by his critics. At one point, Faso expressed what sounded like sincere sympathy to one questioner who recently lost his wife to breast cancer. Left unmentioned by the congressman was that his wife, who was introduced from the audience, is a breast-cancer survivor.

Faso interacted effectively with his audience, I thought, but still got low grades for constituent communication. Communication at the federal level is far different than at the state level, from whence Faso springs. I think Faso is just beginning to get the message that communication is vital at every political level, now more than ever. Faso noted, for instance, that his office received four times more inquiries over a comparable period than his predecessor, **Chris Gibson**, had. At the same time, he said, congressional email goes deaf after 25 messages. He offered no remedies.

I don't think Faso dug himself out of the hole he dug himself by refusing to hold town-hall meetings with constituents, but he made a start. Let's see where this goes.

### Quote and unquote

There were eight Democratic congressional candidates at the recent meet-and-question session at Kingston's Old Dutch Church. A dozen speakers asked questions. That worked out to 96 answers, more, since follow-up questions were allowed. With a margin of error of plus or minus one percent, odds are I should have gotten at least one quote wrong. I did.

**Jeff Beals** told a revealing story about introducing himself to a man at a car show and being immediately warned against “Trump bashing.” Beals said they had a conversation about healthcare. The point, he said to nods in the audience, was that we need to find common ground.

Problem was, I attributed that quote to rival candidate **Gareth Rhodes**. Beals, the attack terrier in this gang of eight, politely advised me of the misquote soon after and asked for a correction. And here it is, with sincere regret.

I assured Beals, new to this political business, that most media work really hard at getting facts and quotes right. Criticism of “fake news” is all the rage these days, but there is a huge difference between fake and mistake. Mine was a mistake. Beals, like every other subject we cover, has the right to be accurately quoted in context.

If it's any consolation, we always strive to do better next time.

### Hail Hillary, again

I think it was **Winston Churchill** who predicted he would be well-treated by history because he intended to write it himself. And he did, brilliantly.

**Hillary Clinton**'s latest self-revelation is called *What Happened*, on sale at book stores all over the land. I thought the title punctuation misplaced. “What Happened?” would have been more accurate.

Clinton is scheduled to appear at Oblong Books in Rhinebeck the evening of Dec. 7 for a book signing. There will be a \$33 charge for the new book, and if the admirer chooses, an additional \$22 for Clinton's previous (children's) book, “It Takes a Village.” Given the results of the last election, she might revise that to “It Takes a Message.”

For those who find \$55 a bit rich, consider this. *Fox-owned New York Post* (hardly the most unbiased source for political news) reports that Clinton will do a book-signing in Montreal on Oct. 23 with a “platinum” charge of \$2,375. Platinum buys backstage access for a meet-and-greet with the author and a photo. An unnamed publishing industry “source” quoted by the *Post* called that tab “a new level of greed.”

Rhinebeck is a special place for the Clintons. Daughter **Chelsea** was married there on Aug. 1, 2010.

### PAC nonsense

Give Kingston Republican Party Chairman **Joe Ingarra** credit for shaking up a moribund political organization (Democrats hold 14 of 15 city elected offices). Ingarra, a former alderman-at-large (1978-79), has candidates running in almost every ward. Some may even compete.

With the election approaching, however, Joltin' Joe might have to curb his enthusiasm in other areas, like asking the state attorney general to conduct an investigation on whether a Kingston grass-roots organization qualifies as a legal political action committee (PAC).

Ingarra, an Uptown lawyer, apparently reasons that if Kingston Citizens walks like a duck and quacks like a duck it must

be a duck, maybe a PAC.

It's not, contends founder **Rebecca Martin**. Kingston Citizens does not “endorse, lobby or raise funds for any candidate or party,” she said, though it does take a keen interest in all manner of issues facing the city. I think they call that democracy, something Ingarra probably studied in his first few weeks in law school. What with political parties being mainly about politics, there should be more organizations like Kingston Citizens in more places.

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**Tim Hunter** September 8, 2017 at 10:28 pm

Hugh...you know I Love you, but Move Forward NY-19 did not, as Faso said..campaign against him.  
The group was not created until AFTER the elections.

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**Neil Millens** September 9, 2017 at 6:00 pm



Re Ingarra, you are missing the real story. It's not so much that he is fielding candidates, but who they are, what they stand for, and how he is using them and vice versa. Many of his crop of Republican candidates aren't even Republicans – they are current or former Democrats who either failed to get the local Democratic Committee endorsements, didn't bother trying, or who had previously failed in the last go around (Brian Woltman, Jim Rodden, Ellen DiFalco, etc.). These Republican candidates, several of whom are also trying to primary their opponents for the Democratic line, hold no allegiance to Republican philosophies or values. They simply want to be aldermen. And Ingarra, is perfectly willing to sell out any vestige of having candidates who embrace Republican values and principles to support these political mercenaries. If you believe in win at any cost – then you should give him credit. If you respect principles and integrity – then not so much. Regardless, if his candidates win, these may be empty victories. That's what you risk when you sell out.

As for the gang of eight, comments like "I assured Beals, new to this political business", while easy to write, aren't that accurate and do a disservice to your readers. I recognize you want to put candidates in a box to simplify things (he's the smart one, that other guy is the rich one, she's the woman), but it really isn't helpful. Like Beals for instance – while he hasn't previously run for office, he was one of the longest serving State Department officials in the Middle East. You can try to imagine the infighting and back door negotiating he faced while dealing with Senators, Congressmen, generals, etc. So I am pretty sure he is not new to politics.

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