

Video Clips of Schiff Town Hall: Democracy Will Not Be Silenced

**An OpEdNews.com Article, a My.BarackObama.com Blog Entry, and
The Subject of an E-Mail to Progressive Activists**

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[CLICK HERE](#) for links to the video clips I have posted at YouTube.

"Restriction of free thought and free speech is the most dangerous of all subversions. It is the one un-American act that could most easily defeat us." --*Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas*

Try though they may, over a thousand well-organized, very vocal opponents of health care reform failed to drown out over a thousand well-organized, very vocal supporters in the boisterous outdoor "town hall" meeting courageously hosted by [Rep. Adam Schiff](#) (D-Pasadena) August 11 in the Alhambra, California, Civic Center. Featuring a panel of health care professionals committed to reform, heroically moderated by local TV medical editor [Dr. Bruce Hensel](#), and covered by the local to national news media, the meeting, though tempestuous, came off as scheduled, unlike recent U.S. town halls effectively shut down by opponents. And most importantly, myths propagated by the leaders of the opposition—misleading their legions of followers—were debunked; much information verifiable if you "read the bill"—as the opponents kept shouting,

even though an unbiased reading of [H.R.3200](#) proves their claims untrue—was presented to an audience estimated by police at 3,000.

[CLICK HERE](#) for links to 28 video clips I have posted at YouTube, documenting the town hall panel discussion and 20 questions from the audience that were answered. With these brief video clips, and their written summaries, you can quickly click to any topic of particular interest to you; and you can see and hear for yourself how American grassroots democracy is persevering in the face of stiff opposition. Witness how a congressman and other responsible leaders are boldly coming together to solve a complex problem vital to us all. And witness how when all voices are heard—despite persistent calls of "Liar!" and "Nazi!" from the opponents, some of whom paraded around with "Don't Tread on Me" flags or even large, professionally printed, utterly disgraceful posters of the President with a Hitler moustache—reason can somehow prevail, even though the issue of health care hits as close to home as any possibly can.

Handling the Disrupters

Under the watchful eye of Alhambra city police officers encircling the perimeter, a tense "standoff" was maintained, until supporters ultimately, vocally outnumbered opponents—despite almost palpable fears throughout the evening that the worst could happen at any time, that chaos would erupt, as had recently happened back East. Following tactics like those in [Right-wing "playbooks" being circulated nationally](#), one particularly noisy opponent near the podium stood up and continued shouting from the very beginning. He was soon surrounded by reform supporters, like white blood cells enveloping a pathogen in the body politic. After getting his 15 minutes (or less) of "fame"—a close-up in the Fox News TV camera—he was escorted away, reportedly by police, who did not appear to intervene at any other time in the loud but otherwise peaceful demonstrations.

Some supporters of reform faulted the congressman and moderator for not confronting the noisy interruptions with anything other than general calls for "courtesy" and "respect." Indeed, some supporters and presumably opponents left early because it was often difficult to hear what was being said. Nonetheless, it is this reporter's opinion that directly confronting those desperately wanting attention, at everyone else's expense, would have inflamed them and would have put them on an equal footing with those who were leading the proceedings; I believe that is how some thugs wrested control of previous town hall meetings away from the emcees. The disrupters have no intention of respecting calls to be civil or to respect the First Amendment rights of others; they are obviously there for precisely the opposite reason. They

want to suppress free speech and, thus, democracy: It is *they* who are acting like fascists. I believe Rep. Schiff and Dr. Hensel took the best approach, in a bad situation: They carried on as gentlemen, with courage and poise "under fire," not letting the childish, boorish behavior of some stop the informational event for the many (Ironically, one of the most mature audience members of the evening was a nine-year-old girl who bravely stood up and asked a compassionate question, about the health care needs of her aunt with nine children).

Some Concerns about the Format

Most of the audience, supporters and opponents, were upset that there was no microphone for audience members who asked questions. The often rambling questions had to be repeated and typically paraphrased by Dr. Hensel, the moderator. Some in the audience doubted the accuracy of his "translations." Most, however, trusted the well-known moderator; and he did allow himself to be corrected by a number of the questioners. Not surprisingly, however, the periods of "silence," as the moderator listened to the questions being asked, were quickly filled with grumblings and rants from the crowd (as if they needed any more reason to make noise). But again, I would put the blame for this squarely on the opponents: Not giving the audience members a mic was another means of preventing opponents from seizing control of the meeting and shutting it down, as some had done in previous meetings. All of us suffer because of the misbehavior of a few.

Finally, it was also argued, by some on both sides, that the presence of a moderator and a

panel of experts was unnecessary and even detrimental. Their introductions and speeches did consume most of the first hour of the meeting, frustrating the audience, who became increasingly, vocally anxious to ask questions. Also, some of the opponents of reform reportedly considered the experts "special interests" wanting to take advantage of government-sponsored reform efforts. However, the panel members were frequently interrupted by applause of support, as they discussed their particular issues of expertise: Dr. Benjamin Chu, of Kaiser, spoke about computerization and other efficiencies that can be made in the system; Jerry Flanagan, of Consumer Watchdog, about consumer and privacy rights; Leeba Lessin, of CareMore, about issues for seniors; and Dr. Francine Kaufman, of Childrens Hospital, about youngsters, as with diabetes. I applaud the congressman for bringing in these articulate and concerned authorities and not claiming to be an expert in all the complex issues. We got the best information possible. And again, Dr. Hensel went above and beyond the call of duty, in moderating a discussion with a most unruly audience.

All in all ...

Although much noisier than desired but much less chaotic than feared, the town hall meeting hosted by Rep. Adam Schiff courageously confronted the myths and opponents of health care reform. As long as we who support reform can continue to inform the public about the real problems and solutions, then I have faith that a majority of Americans will support our efforts. And that is precisely why some of those who

oppose reform are trying their best to stop us: They fear the truth, and they fear—and thus insult—the common sense of the American people.