

Press Coverage

1/6/08 McCain Protest at Town Hall in Salem, NH

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1. Newsday: New Hampshire voters once again back McCain

BY REID J. EPSTEIN

http://www.newsday.com/news/nationworld/ny-usmcca075528993jan07_0,3942600.story

<snip>

At the school, McCain allowed a man who disagreed with him on tax policy five follow-up questions. He regularly gives microphone time to representatives of the One anti-poverty group. And after a group of AIDS activists disrupted his introduction, loudly demanded more AIDS funding, he invited them to chat.

"I don't think I've ever had a town hall meeting that I didn't try to listen to everybody," he told the crowd. "And that's why, frankly, my friends, that's why we're winning this campaign. This is what democracy is all about."

2. LA Times: McCain confronts AIDS protesters

<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/washington/2008/01/mccain-confront.html>

(Also covered on Huffington Post: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/01/06/mccain-confronts-aids-pro_n_80092.html)

Manchester, N.H. -- Republican John McCain's "town hall" meetings routinely are more freewheeling and provocative than the comparable events staged by other presidential candidates. McCain actually enjoys mixing it up with those who disagree with him. Today, though, he was confronted with a determined group of young protestors who simply wanted to shout at him to make their point.

More than 1,000 people -- potentially a good sign for McCain's hopes in Tuesday's primary -- showed up midday to hear and question him at a school gymnasium in Salem, N.H. But, The Times' Maeve Reston reports, moments into his opening remarks the protestors interrupted, waving signs that called for \$50 billion in spending to combat AIDS.

After the crowd greeted their chants with boos, the demonstrators piped down -- prompting McCain to invite them to stay around and discuss the issue with him during the question-and-answer portion of his appearance.

"I don't think I've ever had a town hall meeting where I didn't try to listen to everybody, that's why, frankly, my friends, we're winning this campaign," he said (polls do show him on the rise).

The Q&A was not to be, however. A few minutes into the Arizona senator's remarks, they resumed their chants -- "People with AIDS are dying; you're not even trying."

As they shouted, McCain staff members began escorting them from the room. And some McCain supporters returned rhetorical fire by shouting: "Mac is Back."

McCain also delivered a parting shot: "You know, I've always been curious why people like you who live in a free and open society would disrespect one of the most fundamental parts of America, and that is the ability to take part in the conversation with people who aspire to [political] office. I'll never understand it."

The crowd applauded.

-- Don Frederick

3. CBS: McCain's Town Hall Meeting Readies Him for Debate

From CBS News' Dante Higgins:

SALEM, N.H. -- At Senator John McCain's town hall today in Salem, he was greeted by one of the largest crowds we've seen yet. Over 1,000 people packed themselves into the Woodbury School gymnasium.

While McCain stood on the stage waiting to be introduced, a line of protestors stood up holding black and white signs with the words "HIV/AIDS prevention". They began chanting and then walked out of the room as people in the audience booed.

McCain invited at least one of them to come back and to comment during the Q & A, claiming that's the purpose of these town hall meetings: to discuss issues.

But atn that moment another woman in a different section of the audience started yelling out as McCain was speaking.

“One of the things we do in these town halls is treat each other with respect,” he told the woman. He asked if she could wait until the question period but she wouldn't stop.

“You can't be from New Hampshire, lady,” he said and the room applauded.

“Listen, I've got some old veterans here,” he joked.

Audience members at this point are booing her and yelling for her to go home, others just watched the spectacle.

McCain campaign staffer and debate coach Brett O'Donnell said free speech is what makes democracy great. “I think he [McCain] made a pretty good offer giving them the chance to speak in the Q & A but that wasn't good enough for them,” he said.

McCain is headed to back to his hotel with O'Donnell to prepare for tonight's Fox News debate.

And it turns out today's town hall was part of his debate routine. “We've done the same routine since the first debate, which is we have a town hall, he has a little downtime and then we get him focused,” O'Donnell told CBS News. “These events get his adrenaline going.”

4. Fox News: Disruption at McCain's Townhall! HIV/AIDS activists interfere.
by Carl Cameron

<http://cameron.blogs.foxnews.com/2008/01/06/disruption-at-mccains-townhall-hiv-aids-activists-interfere/> (includes some video)

Salem, N.H.

First six people in front of the TV cameras stood and chanted....and were escorted out. Then McCain began his introduction and another group stood up -out they were marched. He stayed calm and told them he welcomed their question about HIV/AIDS funding and would give them a chance to ask about it at the end of his remarks. Finally.....a large group paraded thru the packed gymnasium holding up placards and chanting, “people with AIDS are dying” and left the townhall.

McCain won,,the crowd loved his reaction.



5. WSJ: McCain Testily Engages Voter at Campaign Event

<http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2008/01/06/mccain-testily-engages-voter-at-campaign-event/>

Alex Frangos reports on the presidential race from Salem, N.H.

John McCain forgot to take his debate game face off when he testily engaged a New Hampshire voter at a campaign event today.

The voter, a registered independent who didn't identify himself, asked McCain why the Arizona senator changed his position on President Bush's first-term tax cuts and said McCain was in "purgatory" with independents for not being fiscally responsible enough. McCain voted against the tax cuts when they were passed in 2001 and 2003, but now thinks they should not be rolled back. "I don't believe increasing taxes is anything that we can do for the American economy right now," he said.

The senator then bristled at the notion that he changed his position — a charge he zinged at Mitt Romney at Saturday's debate. McCain interrupted the questioner at least twice.

The soft-spoken man, who said he has supported McCain since the senator was "at 3% in the polls" said, "it was just a huge disappointment to see you change your position. I'm just," then the senator cut him off.

“First of all I didn’t change my position,” McCain said. “But go ahead. You can say it, but it’s not true. But go ahead.”

[John McCain]

McCain

The questioner tried to recover, “I followed you very closely and you opposed tax cuts and right now you voted.”

McCain interrupted again: “I think I explained why I opposed them.”

The questioner at that point seemed cowered, and said, “I’m not sure I have anything to respond.” McCain seemed to realize he had used his bruising debate style with a voter, and begged the man to continue. He eventually got up the gumption to warn McCain that acting soft on deficit spending would hurt him on Tuesday with the independent voters.

The 71-year-old candidate took around a dozen questions for over an hour in the overheated gym at the Woodbury School in Salem, N.H. He was flanked in the background by white-haired supporters including avuncular actor Wilfred Brimley, well known for his walrus mustache and his oatmeal advertisements. It was McCain’s 101st town hall meeting while campaigning in New Hampshire.

Today’s event, the only public one on the senator’s schedule, was grueling. There were around 1,000 people packed in the gym. Protesters twice interrupted the meeting by thrusting signs above their heads that said “Early treatment for people with HIV” while chanting “You’re not even trying.”

McCain admonished the protestors for not waiting their turn to ask a question, telling one, “You can’t be from New Hampshire, young lady.” The crowd applauded. But McCain eventually did take a question from her, saying he supported funding for AIDS. But he couldn’t help but throw a dig her way. “I did get your question, and I don’t need to hear from you much any more.”

6. National Review: Protesters Disrupt McCain Event

<http://corner.nationalreview.com/post/?q=NzA5OGM0ZWVzM2QwOTU2NTFmYzQ1NDk2OWYzNDE3NDI>

Ramesh Ponnuru

"People with AIDS are dying, and you're not even trying!" is the main chant. McCain had earlier asked the protesters at his Salem, NH, event to wait for the q&a after his remarks and he'd be happy to engage with them. They weren't interested.

7. NYT Photo

http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2008/01/06/us/20080106CAMPAIGN2_12.html



About a dozen protesters calling for more funding for AIDS research interrupted Mr. McCain's town hall event in Salem.

Photo: Stephen Crowley/The New York Times

8. Huckabee, McCain get attention Between debates, men take time to campaign

By Joelle Farrell, Monitor staff

<http://www.concordmonitor.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080107/NEWS01/801070355/1311/48HOURS>

<snip>

Along with the growing audience came a growing press corps, which included foreign journalists and more than a dozen television crews. Protesters capitalized on the bank of cameras to draw attention to their cause: securing more money for AIDS prevention.

"People with AIDS are dying and you're not even trying," a row of protesters chanted as they held up signs demanding \$50 million of AIDS funding for Africa. After about a minute they left, surprising McCain, who is always happy to call on someone from an advocacy group.

9. McCain Tries To Woo Independent Voters

Some See Choice Between McCain, Obama

<http://www.wmur.com/politics/14989550/detail.html?rss=man&psp=news>

<snip>

McCain had a rough start at a town hall meeting in Salem when an activist began shouting at him about help for people with AIDS and others thrust themselves in front of the candidate and national news cameras.

"What you and your friends have done is deprive them of asking a question or making a comment to me," McCain said.

McCain did take a question from the activists and from other voters.

10. Boston Globe: McCain Met By Protesters

By Bryan Bender
Globe Staff

http://www.boston.com/news/politics/politicalintelligence/2008/01/mccain_met_by_p.html

SALEM, N.H. - John McCain's town hall meeting in the Woodbury Junior High gymnasium was briefly interrupted by protesters in the front row shouting "people with AIDS are dying and you're not even trying."

McCain, locked in a dead heat with Mitt Romney in the GOP primary in several new polls, took the incident in stride. The demonstrators were escorted out by McCain aides while the candidate waited silently. But after they left the gym, McCain admonished the protesters - holding "\$50 billion for global AIDS" signs - for not waiting their turn to ask a question.

Another group of anti-illegal immigration protesters awaited him as he arrived for the packed event, some holding placards saying "Stop McCain's Amnesty" and "McCain=Amnesty." Also outside was a third group, from the American Friends Service Committee, holding anti-war banners noting that the cost of one day in Iraq equals health care for 163,525 Americans.

Inside, the standing room only crowd was pumped up by the school's jazz band, and chanted "Mac is back."

"We are winning this campaign," McCain told the crowd.