



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on March 9, 2011

Protestors Shut Down Wisc. Town Hall Meeting

Anti-reform protestors in Wisconsin shouting angry slogans forced two Republican lawmakers to close down a town hall meeting on March 7 aimed at hearing the concerns of constituents. Fears over security and noise levels prompted the early shutdown, according to one of the legislators.

U.S. Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner and state Senator Leah Vukmir, both members of the GOP, hosted the event at a public library in Wauwatosa. But throughout the meeting, [budget-repair bill](#) protestors continually interrupted the legislators while they tried to speak and answer questions.



"This state is so [angry] at Republicans right now because they're trying to shut down debate," one of the protestors hollered at Rep. Sensenbrenner, according to a [report](#) on the event by a local radio station.

"I'm holding a meeting where everybody is invited," the Congressman responded. A protestor then shouted, "Power to the people!" Presumably the angry audience member was referring to "the people" employed by government seeking to keep their generous pensions, health benefits, and powerful unions intact — not the people who pay for those perks.

Another protestor screamed something about the meeting being held at a library. And as Sensenbrenner was trying to respond, yet another angry audience member accused the Congressman of attempting to "shut down any response from these people." The audience cheered and clapped for the interrupting agitators, the radio station [reported](#).

[Video footage](#) of the event shows that as state Senator Vukmir was attempting to [accurately](#) explain the fact that collective bargaining for government employees was not being abolished, attendees booed and shouted [false statements](#) such as "that's a lie" and "that is not true, Senator." Loud and frequent interruptions continued as Vukmir tried to address audience members' questions.

Finally, as the crowd became increasingly agitated and noisy, Congressman Sensenbrenner announced that the meeting would be adjourned. Protestors erupted in fury. "Shame, shame, shame" they repeated over and over again, echoing a [similar incident](#) when an angry mob surrounded another state Senator at the Capitol last week and shouted obscenities along with their "shame" chant.

Watch a video of the town hall meeting's final minutes below:

The morning after the event, Rep. Sensenbrenner [said](#) he feared that violence could have broken out if the meeting had been allowed to continue. But his communications director released a [statement](#) to the press the next day saying constituents were welcome to e-mail or call his office to ask questions or receive help, adding this explanation as to why the meeting was closed down:



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Congressman Sensenbrenner and the Wauwatosa library director repeatedly asked individuals attending last night's Town Hall Meeting to be respectful as other patrons were using the library. After numerous requests for attendees to listen to the individual speaking and be mindful of other library patrons were ignored, the meeting was adjourned.

But apparently another meeting the day before went much better. "It is unfortunate that the same respect given at Congressman Sensenbrenner's Town Hall Meeting in Brookfield Sunday evening wasn't experienced last night, and individuals who were patiently waiting to ask a question, receive help with casework or share their concern were unable to do so at the meeting," the Representative's communications director explained.

State Senator Vukmir also spoke out after the ill-fated town hall event. "We're supposed to be accessible to the people. Because of the volumes of calls, letters and e-mails, I was excited for an opportunity to talk to a number of my constituents in one place and explain my position on issues," she [told Wauwatosa Now](#). "But the longer it went on, the less they were interested in hearing my answers. When I did get to answer they were more interested in telling me I'm wrong than listening."

Vukmir compared the anti-reform crowd's attitude to the "bullying" endured by local governments from union bosses. "They were there to disrupt and intimidate," she told the local news service. "Clearly they were disruptive, but they did not intimidate me."

An individual who claimed to be present at the meeting, identified only as R.V., sent the *Huffington Post* [a statement](#) after the website published a report on the incident. In the message, the person alleged that protestors became angry only after attempting to express their concerns and being "mistreated" by the Republican legislators.

The audience "was not unruly, it was just loud when the crowd was mistreated and terribly disrespected," the person claimed, saying Rep. Sensenbrenner was "grumpy" from the beginning. "It started out that way, and the Congressman and [state] Senator were both rude from the start, assuming a battle would take place, and refusing, from the top, to use a microphone."

Of course, the alleged attendee neglected to mention that the town hall meeting was in an occupied library — a frequent locale for the Congressman's meetings — so a microphone may not have been appropriate. Eventually Sensenbrenner did [decide](#) to use a microphone anyway, but only after being assured by library staff that it would not disrupt patrons.

"The protestors were outside, yelling, the rest of the constituents were inside, wanting answers to their questions and receiving token talking points that too often had nothing to do with what they asked — that was the jeering, because we were being played and lied to," R.V. claimed in the statement.

[Tensions](#) have been running high in Wisconsin for weeks as elected officials [attempt](#) to close a multi-billion dollar budget deficit by trimming spending and curtailing some of the powers of government-employee unions. A coalition of socialists, union bosses, national leftist groups, and others has been engaged in more than [three weeks of fierce demonstrations in Madison](#) to protest against the proposed reforms.

Democrats actually [fled the state](#) in an effort to block the reform vote, denying the 20-senator quorum necessary to vote on fiscal issues. Republicans have [tried](#) levying fines, holding the runaway lawmakers in contempt, and even authorizing law enforcement to bring them back. So far nothing has worked, but some media outlets reported on March 7 that the [standoff could be coming to an end soon](#).



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The [stakes](#) are obviously high. A victory in Wisconsin, according to [analysts](#), could signify a trend and give either side momentum to pursue similar battles in other states. The protests have [spread](#) across the nation as both sides attempt to [recall](#) state Senators over the proposal.

The Wisconsin Assembly [passed](#) the budget-repair bill in late February, and the Senate is [expected](#) to do so as soon as at least one Democratic state Senator appears at the Capitol. If the measure fails to pass in the very near future, more than 10,000 government workers could be [laid off](#), Gov. Scott Walker said.

Photo: Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner at a 2010 town hall meeting.

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