

NO KINGS! AROUND THE PARTISAN BEND ON DOGE [SIC] AND UKRAINE

On Bluesky, folks are posting video of one after another town hall in Republican congressional districts that get heated (Nicole and I addressed the first prominent example, a Rich McCormick town hall in suburban Atlanta, in our Friday podcast).

Amid the din of lefty pundits still focused primarily on why Democratic members of Congress aren't doing more, these town halls demonstrate the efficacy of speaking to Republicans. Whether or not they change a Congressman's mind right away, they get press – especially local press that remains more trusted. And they define the terms of debate on which left and right might find common agreement.

This is politics.

This is a kind of politics that Democrats have too often eschewed in recent years as consultants told candidates that they couldn't swing voters in culturally conservative areas. (Note, one of the events in the past week, a WI Eau Claire area event focused on the pain farmers are experiencing, also served as an opportunity to ask why Madison's Mark Pocan had shown up but local WI CD-3 Congressman Derrick Van Orden did not; Orden underperformed the district's R+4 lean against Rebecca Cooke in November.)

This kind of politics is not sufficient to reverse the fascist trend in America, but it is an irreplaceable part of any effort to try.

I want to look at this report, from a Scott Fitzgerald town hall in West Bend, northwest of Milwaukee (the district also includes Waukesha, a conservative Milwaukee exurb). The progression

of the town hall – Milwaukee NBC reporter Charles Benson says his was the only news station in attendance – offers certain lessons.

As described, residents asked Fitzgerald *why* he wasn't involved in all the DOGE [sic] efforts (a question Democrats are just as insistently asking their Democratic representatives).

Residents came with questions for their congressman.

"How can we be represented by you if you don't have a voice in Congress?" asked Lorraine Henrickson.

They didn't like some of Scott Fitzgerald's answers.

"The end result of the fraud and abuse that has been discovered already," Fitzgerald said before getting pushback from the audience.

Fitzgerald answered with the rote answer Republicans are still offering: that DOGE [sic] is pursuing fraud and abuse.

Of course, *there's no evidence that Elon is finding fraud and abuse*. One after another analysis has debunked that claim – most recently a WSJ piece largely matching an earlier NPR one that remains among the best – that this is fraud. WSJ found that much of it is research, and just 2% of that is "DEI."

I still think the NPR is one of the best, but the WSJ piece offers a way to share a Murdoch source with Republican members of Congress to disabuse them that this is about efficiency.

Fitzgerald's constituents continued to ask why he, as a member of Congress, was doing nothing to oversee this and he kept retreating behind his false claim that DOGE [sic] is finding stuff.

Mary Sylvester asked about the role and responsibility of Congress. "We need

three branches of government, not one. When will you stand up and say that's enough?"

Michael Wittig is concerned with Elon Musk's role in the Trump administration—he held a sign that read "Presidents are not kings."

"Are you going to subpoena him at some point? Are you willing to use your subpoena power to tell Musk to stand in front of Congress and answer some hard questions?"

Fitzgerald insists Musk's efforts to find waste and fraud are working, and Congress will eventually have budget oversight.

But then the conversation shifted (as it did in a Kevin Hern Oklahoma town hall where something similar happened) to Ukraine. While Fitzgerald backed Trump's stated desire to end the war in Ukraine, he did agree with attendees on two points: That Ukraine did not start this war, and that Volodymyr Zelenskyy needs to be in the room for discussions on how to end it.

Many here worry about Ukraine. When asked, Fitzgerald disagreed with Trump's false claim that Ukraine started the war.

"No, Ukraine did not start the war."

Fitzgerald was an early supporter of U.S. aid to Ukraine but now believes Trump is right to try to end it.

"I don't think the president's goals are not what everybody wants, which is to end the war."

In the end, Fitzgerald won over the crowd with this answer and suggestion about Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky.

“Zelensky needs to be in the room,” said Fitzgerald. “He absolutely needs to be in the room.”

Fitzgerald hid behind claims that DOGE [sic] was chasing fraud and abuse, claims that have been debunked but which apparently weren't debunked here.

But on Ukraine, he refused to back several of the untenable claims the Trump Administration has adopted.

It may well be that Trump will coerce cowardly Republicans to adopt his false claims about Ukraine in the days ahead – indeed, some have, wholeheartedly. I hope that as more media outlets expose DOGE's fraudulent claims about waste, constituents will get better at debunking the entire claimed premise of DOGE [sic].

But in just one week of contentious confrontations, a slight break between Trump and even rabid Republicans has become clear: Ukraine.

That's an important lesson.

Trump is trying to hide behind DOGE [sic] to pull off the firing of a bunch of people who either are or offer services cherished by the constituents of Republican Congressmen. That, by itself, is enough to create this problem for right wingers. *Their* constituents, just as much as Maryland and Virginia members of Congress, are the ones getting the axe.

But Trump is trying to do it even as he sells Ukraine out to Russia. And that's an issue on which some Republicans are less willing, at least so far, to adopt Trump's propaganda.

Note, MoJo's Clara Jeffries posted some of these TikTok videos to Bluesky.

Rich McCormick, GA CD-7 R+13

Scott Fitzgerald, WI CD-5 R+14

Glenn Grothman, WI CD-6 R+10

Kevin Hern, OK CD-1 R+14

Stephanie Bice, OK CD-5 R +12 (Bice repeated
false claims about FEMA funding for migrants)

Kevin Kiley, CA CD-3 R+4

Jay Obernolte, CA CD-23 R+8

Cliff Bentz, OR CD-2 R+15 (TPM roundup)