

With the House adjourned and the Senate set to do so any day now, your elected officials will be coming home to politics, vacation and interact with voters. The Motorcycle Riders Foundation (MRF) recognizes this as a convenient, relaxed, and productive way to meet with your legislators in their home districts. One way that they interact with a lot of voters at once is the traditional town hall meeting. However, becoming more and more popular is the so-called "tele-town hall meeting" where you get a robo call asking you if you want to listen in on the actual meeting that usually took place a few hours earlier. While this new form of communicating can be very informative, it simply does not replace face-to-face interaction with the person you pay to represent you in Washington.

Unfortunately, the House Democratic leadership doesn't feel that way. At this point everyone knows that Washington is urgently working on overhauling our health care system. You may have seen some footage earlier this week of Members of Congress holding town hall meetings and getting skewered by their constituents, who are begging them to not overhaul the entire system so fast or not to spend any more taxpayer money, as well as any other number of hot-button issues. Because this makes the health care overhaul unpopular with some voters, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has asked Members of Congress not to hold actual town hall meetings, but to instead hold only tele-town hall meetings. In a memo leaked to the MRF, House Democrat leadership lays out the reasons why Members should tele-town hall. It is, of course, up to the will of the elected official to hold or not hold traditional town hall meetings.

Now, let's be clear, this is not about donkeys and elephants. This is about you being able to go to a town hall meeting and tell your elected official how you feel on any issue face to face. It's about looking people in the eye and getting an answer, not just merely leaving a voicemail with your concerns. So here's your homework in the MRF's view. Contact your two Senators and one Representative, who you pay to come to Washington, and find out when and where the real town hall meeting is; then plan to attend. They may hold more than one, but that's not likely.

The MRF is concerned with a few issues that you should bring up. The first issue is the upcoming Highway Bill. The House Transportation Committee will be working on the bill at the full committee level in September. The current bill expires 9-30-09. US Senator Barbara Boxer, Chairwoman of Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, has already passed the 18-month extension President Obama asked for. The MRF feels that a year and half is unacceptable. At this point some extension is necessary, but a year and half is just too long. Ask your elected officials to focus on the bill and pass it. We haven't seen the entire bill yet, but House Chairman Oberstar has some very promising motorcycle-specific language on the table.

The other issue that the MRF feels you should bring up is health care reform. It's not clear if the votes are there to pass a bill, but Democrat leadership is working hard to close the gap. We don't have to demand that they not overhaul the system; we just have to look out for motorcyclists. At this point there are no anti-motorcycle provisions or suggestions. The MRF's main concern is that it's not unreasonable to think that at some point, someone in the government will suggest not covering motorcycle injuries in a government-run health plan, and that makes the idea of a government-run public plan unacceptable.

Please do not hesitate to contact the MRF DC office should you need any additional information.