

# LAWLER FACES DOWN CRITICS AT TOWN HALL IN DUTCHESS

BY: Keith S. Shikowitz, Editor in Chief/Investigative Reporter



Congressman Mike Lawler's town hall meeting have traditionally been raucous events. About 100 people attended this town hall which was at Van Wyck Junior High School in Wappinger Falls. This one was more raucous than all the others. The opposition started spewing out its vitriol soon after the Pledge of Allegiance. A man stood up without even asking to be heard and began reading and yelling from what appeared to be large index cards his problems with the Congressman and President Trump. Lawler responded, "The fact that you have to read that says everything. You have to read it because you don't actually believe it. You're just spewing out a nonsense."



Throughout the entire town hall, Lawler remained calm and collected until one person stepped way over the line and made a comment about Lawler's children. Lawler called him a scumbag and for the first time in my coverage of his town halls, people said justifiably, dropped an F bomb.

Normally I don't put my views into stories I am writing, but this is one of those times it is necessary. Strictly speaking as a constituent who wants to hear what our elected representatives have to say not have to listen to people yelling and preventing him from giving answers to pertinent questions. People come to town halls to speak to and get information from their elected officials. The problem here is that the opposition does not give Lawler a chance to answer questions that are asked. They yell, call him names, boo and act like what Lawler has called them out as children. This is not the way to have CIVIL discourse and discussion. They want answers but they only want the answers that align with their views. They don't want to hear answers they don't agree with. When Lawler gave them answers they didn't like, they got angry and tried to push him to answer with what they wanted to hear, not the answer he was giving. This is not the way to conduct yourself in what is supposed to be an informational dialogue.

"My name is AJ. I will be your moderator this evening and thank you all for being here. Town halls are an important part of representative government. They give constituents the

opportunity to ask questions, raise concerns, and hear directly from the person elected to represent them in Washington. Congressman Lawler represents New York's 17th Congressional District, which includes communities across Rockland, Putnam, Dutchess, and Westchester counties in the Hudson Valley.

Since taking office, he has held 15 town halls throughout the district because he believes that hearing directly from the people he represents is essential to do the job well. Before we begin, I want to quickly review a few ground rules to help make sure tonight's conversation is productive and respectful."

He explained that this event is intended for residents of New York's 17th Congressional District. Attendees other than accredited members of the press must live in the district and may be asked to provide proof of residency. If you cannot provide proof of residency upon request, you may be asked to leave. Obviously, you're all in the room already. Questions will be taken from attendees whose tickets are called. When your ticket is called, you will have one minute to ask your question, and we're going to keep it moving so many of you can get your questions asked tonight.

We ask that everyone remains respectful to one another and to the staff and to the congressman. There's no shouting, no yelling, no standing during the program. I think this is a really good opportunity here in Hopewell to get your questions answered by your congressman, and we really want many of you to get your questions in, so, with that, any disruptions or violations of these rules may result in removal from the event of the discretion of law enforcement and security. Finally, to the members of the press, you're asked to remain in your assigned section. Flash photography, tripods, and audio video recording are only permitted for accredited members of the press. Yet there were people who were doing video with their phones when it looked like a person being disruptive was going to be removed.

<https://youtu.be/1-SVhMtoH4o>

Through the aforementioned person's diatribe, Lawler remained cool and continued his opening statement. "Look, I am upholding my Constitutional duties. I'm proud of my record. I'm proud of everything I have done in Congress. Every vote I have taken. I have represented this district fully. Unlike many of my colleagues, I'm actually willing to stand here and listen to your questions. So, in the interest of respecting everyone else who came out here tonight, you can either sit down or leave."



People in the audience started yelling at the guy to go home. Lawler told the guy that this is his second attempt to get a few minutes of fame. "You can leave if you continue to be disrespectful. You know what's fascinating, we are in a middle school and middle school children act better than you do. Why don't you leave if you don't want to act like an adult." The man refused to stop and respect others. He was eventually escorted out of the auditorium.

After that guy was escorted out, Lawler got on with his opening statement.

[https://youtu.be/FQC6e63E\\_5Q](https://youtu.be/FQC6e63E_5Q)

They're also working on getting a permitting reform bill done. Now why is that? Because if you could maybe control yourself for 5 seconds, OK, yeah, yes. There was continued boos and heckling from his detractors. He responded, "Well, I know it's, you know, it's funny, if you have no interest in actually hearing what I have to say, then why are you here? Just to scream? The faster that you stop screaming, the faster we can get to your questions. Yeah, I know none of you are interested. That's the funny part."

Unperturbed, he continued. "When we look at permanent reform, why does permanent reform matter? Well, we need to actually increase energy production in America, renewables, solar, wind, you agree? We need nuclear. We need gas. We need natural gas in New York. The fact is, as I called for, we need to rebuild and reopen Indian Point Nuclear Power plant. Indian Point supplied 25% of the energy for the region. Have you noticed that your utility bills have gone through the roof? Why? Because we don't have enough supply here in NY. Since closing Indian Point, we have had to import electricity from other states, so your delivery charge has gone through the roof. So, the objective should be to actually increase production, which means we need it means. We need offshore wind. We need solar. Natural gas."

Lawler then talked about the border problem stating that in addition, they are focused on securing our border. There has been nearly 1 year straight of net zero illegal entry into the country. A constituent of his was murdered by an illegal immigrant who enter into this country under Biden administration. Her parents live in your town. He hoped everyone in this crowd would empathize with the fact. Senselessly murdered by an illegal who was not only detained at the border but released into the country, he was then arrested for shoplifting and released by the Chicago Police Department and then executed her when she was looking at the northern lights with her friends at college. That is something that should never happen in our country.

“We also should not have sanctuary jurisdictions in our country. We need to make this move by states like NY who have refused to cooperate with law enforcement. We are tackling this issue in Washington right now and we continue to focus on them despite the yelling, and with that, I'm happy to take your questions, of which I know you are, are very much looking forward to my answers.”

AJ drew the first ticket it was for Marie Slimak number 798135.



AJ Drawing first ticket

<https://youtu.be/BzkbneTTj4>

He asked, “By a show of hands, how many people's utility bills have gone up over the last 5 years?” About 75% of the people raised their hands. Continuing, “So If we're to tackle the fundamental issue driving people out of this state, it boils down to 3 things. It is taxes, housing costs, mortgages, and rent, which is out of control, and it is utility costs. Those are the three things that are making it unaffordable for people to live in New York and certainly in the hudson Valley. That is why I have focused extensively on these issues.”

He asked how we can address the cost of living. This has been his focus and what he'll continue to do.

He then addressed the topic of the billionaires stating that over the last decade, blue states, specifically New York and California, have lost trillion in wealth, \$2 trillion. “Now what does that mean? You're waving it off, but it has a direct impact on all of us. \$2 trillion in wealth, what it means is that. Someone called out LIAR!

And it is true; millionaires are moving to states that have lower tax burdens. They are moving their businesses, or they are growing their

businesses in other states. JPMorgan Chase is a perfect example. They just built a building in Manhattan. Do you know that for the first time in the history of JPMorgan Chase, has more employees in Dallas, Texas than they do in New York? Same thing with Goldman Sachs, they have more employees in Dallas, Texas than they do in New York? The fact is that these businesses, one of the bad parts of COVID, of which there were many, but one of the bad things to come out of COVID is that a lot of corporate America and Wall Street realize they don't need to be in New York to operate.”

Lawler point out that as much as everybody wants to rail against the billionaires, and they want to rail against corporate America, and Wall Street, that has a negative impact on us. So, when Mamdani says that he wants to raise taxes to balance his budget. He has an \$8 billion budget deficit and he's talking about increasing spending by billions of dollars.

How did they balance their budget? They did the PETAT tax, which they said was going to be on homes valued at five million, now it's homes at one million. They changed that like that. They go from 5 million to 1 million in the span of 3 weeks. That's starting in on millionaires.

He then spoke about what NYS is doing with pension pay. What did they do? They deferred pension payments How many of you are public employees? How many of you have been a cop, a firefighter, a teacher, or a nurse? A number of people raised their hands. Kathy Hochul and Zohran Mamdani said we're going to defer pension payments. That creates a crisis for the pension system. Why defer pension payments to balance NYC's budget? How about you stop increasing spending year over year over year and start making spending cuts!

The next question was by Jennifer Cabrera asked about ACA, the BBB and Medicaid.

“Here's, here's the reality. Medicaid more than doubled in 5 years. That is on an unsustainable trajectory. And so, specifically what we did on Medicaid was a few things. Number 1, speed up eligibility verification to make sure that people are not staying on Medicaid when they're no longer eligible. Number 2, make sure that only citizens are eligible for it and they have to prove citizenship. In NY they were allowing non-citizen on it. No, it's not a lie. You're arguing about it and complaining that we changed the rules. So yes, it was true that New York was allowing non-citizens to collect Medicaid benefits. Three what we said is that if you are an able-bodied adult without dependent children. Those folks were on the Medicaid program under the expansion population. They're not part of traditional Medicaid. If those folks are able-bodied without dependent children and refuse to work, we would put work requirements on them. They need to get a job, they need to go to school, they need to volunteer. That is not something that is unfair. That is making sure that the program is sustained for the people who actually rely on it.

In addition, the language of the bill provides to protect those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Nobody, including the commercial that was put out with a patient with cerebral palsy saying that their Medicaid was in jeopardy, That is a lie. The fact is that the changes that were made were made to sustain the program for those who rely on it.

This shows consistency in his statements and promises. At the Rally in the Valley, he stated the following:

<https://youtu.be/uYuBeDnZoCc>

“Even with the changes Medicaid is growing by 25% over the next 10 years. We are not cutting Medicaid costs. What we are doing is bending the curve so that you can actually sustain the rate of growth to protect the program for those who actually need it. To explain to you what was actually in the bill, what was not in the bill, because the reality is I actually read this. I and a handful of members that were able to stop changes to FMAC. We were able to stop any changes to the federal share of Medicaid. Some of my colleagues advocated to take the expansion population from 90% federal share to 50%. I said no. I stopped that. They wanted to change the traditional share of Medicaid from 50% threshold to 45%. I said no. I stopped that when you scream about this bill what you don't seem to grasp is we were able to protect New York from a lot of changes that would have caused a serious problem.

A participant began heckling again. Lawler responded, “You should be ashamed of yourself. You're acting like a 5-year-old. Sit down and stop. If you can't control yourself, you're welcome to leave.

When it comes to the MCO tax, for instance, I was able to extend the MCO tax. I dealt with Dr. Oz specifically on the MCO tax. The MCO tax was rewritten under the Biden administration and was done for 2 years and even when the Biden administration approved the MCO tax, (Managed Care Organizations) the Biden administration had said to New York State, this is not going to last in perpetuity We're trying to help you out of COVID. So what we were able to do with the MCO tax was get Dr. Oz and this administration to extend it from March 31<sup>st</sup> of this year through December 31<sup>st</sup> that brought an additional \$1.2 billion to New York State.

<https://youtu.be/IVhRZMpyvA>

Maura McCabe. Asked about how the ballroom was an imperative and how it would benefit the people of the district “Specifically referring to this, my wife and I were at the White House Correspondents' Dinner, and the question was asked in an interview following that

and what I was talking about specifically was from the standpoint of securing a large-scale event. The fact that you've now had 3 assassination attempts on the sitting president and at the time of a candidate.” Someone asked him to get to the ballroom. “I will get to that if you give me a second, please.”

“The fact is that I don't care who the president is, ensuring the safety and security of the president is imperative. If you look at the fact that the Secret Service has been severely understaffed during that incident, the Secret Service was not being paid. You had a Secret Service agent that took a bullet dead center in his chest, who was not being paid because Chuck Schumer and Hakeem Jeffries shut down the government. The ballroom I've said repeatedly not one penny of taxpayer money should be used for the ballroom. I've said that publicly. I've said that repeatedly. If the president wants to raise money as JFK did, as Harry Truman did, as the Bush's did, as the Clintons did. If the president wants to raise private funds to upgrade the White House to the White House grounds, I have no problem with that. That that's irrelevant from my standpoint. The, the White House has been continually upgraded and renovated at times.

“The issue of security with respect to the east wing. There was a secure bunker underneath the east wing that obviously would have to be built as part of any the grounds themselves, the security aspect on the grounds themselves, in many respects, are outdated. I've been in the White House. I've been in the West Wing. I've been in different aspects of the White House grounds. There's no question that that is the most secure place to be able to ensure the safety of the president. When you look at some of these large-scale events that do take place in Washington. There's really only 1 location that generally is able to fit, and that's the Hilton, that's the, the Washington Hilton where this incident occurred.”

According to Lawler If you look at, if you look at, that incident, to him there were numerous security breaches that have to be addressed, and the fact that somebody was able to get in the hotel without going through magnetometers to be able to get multiple guns into an empty stairway, able to get into the lower levels is a major problem. That was a security breach that has to be addressed by the Secret Service and so the Secret Service is requesting more funds to support their mission. That is something that he doesn't care who the president is and says that ensuring his or her safety is something that I agree with.

People booed his response and AJ responded “I know a lot of you maybe didn't like that question or the answer but one of your residents did ask.

<https://youtu.be/AoddEPHQIYo>

“In addition, one of the things that I've been focused on is the fact that if you're a small business, you have a real problem being able to purchase a cost-efficient plan for your employees, which creates a challenge then if they're no longer providing employee coverage, people get forced into the open market. So, one of the things that we're trying to do that we passed through the House at the end of December that every Democrat voted against was associated health plans to allow small businesses to be able to pool their resources together. They don't have to know each other. They don't have to be connected in any way, but to be able to pool their resources together and purchase plans at a much cheaper rate because you have a bigger pool of people to insure.”

ongressional Budget Office) scored that and said that that would come down, bring insurance premiums down by 11% if you pass associated health care country. The exchange is but one aspect of our healthcare, and the enhanced premium tax credit applied it covered 7% of the population, which 6% of the population was not impacted by the enhanced premium tax credit expiring. Their rates skyrocketed. We should be focused, but part of this address the reason. What is the core function of why insurance rates keep going up. The insurance companies need to be overhauled. I think all of the companies are not doing what needs to be done. Their profits have gone up 1000% in 15 years. Lawler explained.

Someone brought up the idea of Medicare for all. Lawler's response is that Medicare for all will cost trillions. “We have a shortage of doctors, nurses and home health aides. We are not producing the level of workforce that we need is. This is the reason why I am a Chief co-sponsor of the Dignity Act. It's part of the reason why I fought back against the administration on ending Haitian TPS. TPS holders from Haiti work in our healthcare system lawfully. They're here lawfully and work in our healthcare system. If you, if you shut off TPS immediately, you are going to create a real catastrophe within our healthcare system. That is why I pushed back against that. So there are a number of aspects of this that I think we have to look at.”

Another thing that Lawler says needs work is the pharmaceutical industry. What the president has talked about with most favored nation status is right. Europe.... Interrupted again... no, it's not wrong. Europe has price controls, puts price controls on American drugs that are being imported in. We are paying for that and subsidizing that for Europe. That should not happen. We should not be paying for drugs for Europeans.

One of the many anti – Lawler Medicaid ads with a lady saying her 103-year-old mother was losing her Medicaid because of Lawler voting to cut it to give tax breaks to billionaires. Tina Bondar was there and got to ask her question to Lawler about this. Lawler explained to and assured her that her mother's Medicaid is not being cut.



Tina Bondar

<https://youtu.be/gpOrkKFwaD8>

Lawler thanked everyone for being there and told them he's looking forward to continuing to serve.