

## **Be a Voice for Science this Midterm Election**

### *An Action Guide for Scientist Advocates*

The 2018 midterm elections are kicking into full gear this August, and it's our chance to ensure that we elect legislators that will stand up for science and safeguard our health and safety. And with the record number of attacks on science, your voice is crucial: Over the past two years, the Trump administration and Congress have sidelined science to an unprecedented extent, pushing through the agendas of wealthy corporate donors while disregarding the evidence about the dangers those policies pose to Americans' health and safety.

As scientists and constituents, we are in unique position to connect the dots between science and issues like clean air, safe water, and climate change impacts -- and to inject this critical connection between science, public health, and policymaking into the conversation.

**It is more important now than ever that candidates running to represent you know that their constituents care about defending science's ability to protect the public.** Using this guide, you can make a difference. Join scientists throughout the country to demand that candidates across the political spectrum articulate how they intend to protect local constituents who are harmed when facts and evidence are pushed aside by presidential order, congressional action, or through the work of political appointees at government agencies.

With this guide, you will learn three ways to get your candidates and the public talking about federal science for public good:

1. *Speaking Out at Town Halls and Public Forums*
2. *Putting a Spotlight on Science in Local Media Coverage*
3. *Getting Your Candidates Talking on Twitter*

By bringing critical issues to the public spotlight and getting candidates on the record, we can raise the political cost to the Trump administration and Congress of pursuing an anti-science agenda -- and help make sure the incoming Congress understands their responsibility. Congress must hold the administration accountable for its harmful and illegal actions and fight for the health and safety of their constituents. **That's why we'll be fighting harder than ever to use science, facts, and evidence to help guide our policies and democracy. And we need scientists throughout the country to speak up to make that a reality.**

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### **Speaking Out at Town Halls and Public Forums**

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Events like town hall meetings and public forums during the midterms are great opportunities for you to not only bring public attention to an issue but also have direct contact with your local elected officials. By asking a question that requires a response on the spot, you can sometimes get your policymaker's position on the record. Here are tips for effective engagement with elected officials at public events:

- Keep tabs on events where your candidates will appear. Check out their webpage, follow their Facebook or Twitter pages, and sign up for their email newsletter. You can also call their local district or campaign offices, which can be especially fruitful ahead of congressional recesses (see [www.congress.gov](http://www.congress.gov) for recess dates).
- Be clear and prepare. To make a powerful impression, draft a question or comment that hits the “three Cs”: concise, concrete, and compelling. Your goal is not to share a lot of information—it’s about piquing the interest of the legislator or community to further delve into the issue. In just a few sentences, do the following:
  - o Introduce yourself as a constituent and comment on your standing as a scientist or technical expert on the issue
  - o State why the issue matters and what’s at stake for the local community. If you have a petition or resource to deliver to make your point, be sure to have that in-hand.
  - o Make a specific “ask”—the action or stance you want the candidate to take. If your goal is focused on getting them to take a specific position, frame it as a yes or no question. E.G. “Will you commit to...”. If it’s to get them saying what they will do on an issue, frame it directly “What actions will you take to...”

If you’re feeling creative, show up with signs (if allowed), shirts, or other items that increase your visibility.
- Position yourself as a resource. Connect with the legislator’s staff to introduce yourself as both a constituent and a technical expert, reiterate your request, and offer any support or resources that would help educate the staff. This is a great opportunity to build personal relationships.
- Follow up. Ask for business cards of the candidates’ staff and send a thank-you note or call to thank them for their time. Share relevant information such as fact sheets or summaries of technical reports. Or, if you were unable to ask your question at the meeting, a follow-up call with the legislator’s office gives you another chance to ask it. Be sure to record the candidate’s response as close to verbatim as you can, to include that in the follow-up.
- Keep it up, and invite others to join! Getting your candidate on the record at townhalls and public appearances can take a few tries. To share the load (and the fun), invite others to join you in scouting for events, prepping sample language, and attending. Three very simple yet effective pointers to get called on at an event-- get your hand up “first, high, and fast” the moment there is a hint that the Q&A is coming, make enthusiastic eye contact with the candidate throughout their speech, and sit toward the front.

**Sample Comment and Question:**

*“Hi, I’m a [city/ town] resident voter, and a [mention of your standing as a scientist or technical expert, topic, and local institution of which you’re a part.] This community depends on federal agencies like the EPA and the FDA to use science to keep us safe and healthy. That’s why the attacks on science by both Congress and the Trump administration have real consequences on our local communities, such as [give a few-word example of a well-known local public health risk or incident such as poor air quality, a superfund site, or water contamination.] What will you do to defend against efforts to cut science out of public protections?”*

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## Putting a Spotlight on Science in Local Media Coverage on the Midterms

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Candidates strive for a reputation of having 'pulse' on issues of importance to their constituents and being responsive to the electorate's concerns. That's why candidates' campaigns tend to keep a close eye on media coverage, including LTEs, in their local papers—and why writing a letter-to-the-editor (LTE) or an op-ed to your local or regional newspaper is a very effective means to put a critical topic in the public eye.

With the editorial page being one of the most read pages in the paper, having a strong LTE or op-ed published offers a dual purpose: you reach both a wide public and the candidates for elected office with the same effort. And even if your letter is not published, it is important for educating and persuading editors. Receiving letters on a given topic flags for editors that it may be worth their time covering that issue—both on the editorial page and in news articles. It clearly expresses the issue's importance to the community. Here are our tips for writing an effective letter:

- *Respond to an article in the paper or candidates' public statements.* Many papers require that LTEs reference an article that ran in the paper within the past few days. Some papers do occasionally print LTEs noting a lack of coverage. And during elections, writing about science-based issues, like climate change, could be a hot-button topic. Leverage this unique politically moment to help inject evidence-based discussion in the media. Consider: Are there any local or captivating factoids you can use to educate the public, a candidate statement to fact-check, or an important issue important to your community not adequately addressed by candidates.
- *Be nonpartisan.* Your LTE can help educate candidates and fellow constituents on nonpartisan, science-based policy solutions. It is best to avoid calling out candidates by party association. Remember, all candidates can and do learn from this public education
- *Make it concrete with a clear question or call to action.* It is important to get a candidate on the record about her or his policy stances. Asking questions of candidates participating in an election race can encourage clearer policies. And outline the actions you want the candidates to take.
- *Keep it local.* Candidates want to know what issues their potential constituents care about most. Be specific! If you can, highlight the local impacts that a current or proposed policy would have on your community. Refer to the election race as specifically as possible. If the letter includes a candidate's name, in almost all cases staff will give him or her the letter to read personally.
- *Keep your letter short, focused, and interesting.* In general, letters should be under 200 words; stay focused on one (or, at the most, two) main point(s); and get to the main point in the first two sentences. If possible include interesting facts, relevant personal experience, and any local connections to the issue. If your letter is longer than 200 words, it will likely be edited or not printed. Include your word count at the top of your letter.
- *Write the letter in your own words and embrace your standing as a scientist constituent.* Editors want letters in their papers to be original and from a reader. Be sure that you take the time to write the letter in your own words, including embracing your perspective as both a local scientist and member of the community. And, if you have relevant qualifications to the topic you're addressing or are a member of a notable institution or professional community, be sure to include that in your letter. If you are a health professional writing about a health issue or an engineer writing about infrastructure —share that information up front.

- Follow the paper's directions. Information on how and to whom to submit a LTE is usually found right on the letters page in your paper or on the newspaper's website. This often includes guidelines on what the paper looks for in LTEs. Follow these guidelines to increase the likelihood that your letter will be printed. If you can't find the information you need, simply call the paper and ask how to go about submitting a letter in response to a recently published article. This also means including your name, address, and daytime phone number; the paper will contact you before printing your letter.

**Template Letter to the Editor:**

*To the editor:*

*I read the story, (insert title), with great interest. I was (pleased/disappointed) to (see/not see) ample discussion and coverage of (insert issue area) by the candidates in (insert election race).*

*It is important for all candidates in (race) to speak up about (issue). This is an issue that elected officials must be ready to address, as it impacts (insert location) by (insert reason), and (insert reason). [If asking for a specific action or commitment: Families of (city/town) deserve to know anyone willing to represent them will (insert action/ stance here).] (Insert why this matters to you as a scientist and a member of the local community.)*

*As local scientist and engaged voter, I look forward to hearing more about what the candidates have to say on (issue) to demonstrate that they are committed to protecting science's ability to protect our community.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Name*

*Hometown or zip code, Professional title (if OK with your employer's policy)*

*Word count: #*

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## **Getting Your Candidates Talking on Twitter**

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There is often buzz on social media leading up to elections, making it a lively space for public discussions where candidates can keep a pulse on conversations and topics that are of interest to their constituency. Members of Congress and candidates increasingly use these platforms to monitor and interact with people, making this prime real estate for hooking onto a conversation or issue they are showing interest in and catching their attention for a response.

Check out UCS' Social Media Coordinator, Diana Vasquez's answers to frequently asked questions about how to get the attention and response of candidate on Twitter:

### ***How can I easily follow what my candidates are interested in or talking about, and plug in the conversation?***

Create a Twitter List for your candidate and some consistent times to check that list and see what they're tweeting about. Anywhere they are talking about a related topic—and a topic where you can smoothly pivot to science and the community safety—tweet at them. Check out trending topics and hashtags; consider whether you have anything to add.

#### *Top Tips:*

- *If you're not sure if a hashtag is trending, I recommend using [hashtagify.me](https://www.hashtagify.me) as a tool to ensure you efficiently use hashtags that have the greatest visibility.*
- *If you want help keeping track and monitoring your lists, I recommend using a social media monitoring tool like Hootsuite or Tweetdeck.*

### ***How do I get my candidates' attention?***

Connect the action request or question you want to get them on the record with a popular local issue or a conversation they are already engaging in on Twitter. When tweeting at them, be sure to Tag them (i.e., include a person's "handle" in your message), and encourage and tweet at others to join you in tweeting at the candidate with the same or similar question. The more people speak out about the issue, the strong the signal is to candidates that this is an issue they cannot ignore.

If the candidate is speaking at a public event, use that event to "live tweet" at them. They are often following twitter to gauge the public's reaction to their appearances and statements, and this is a moment where you might catch their eye.

#### *Top Tips:*

- *If you're starting a tweet with a person's handle, be sure to include a "." as the first character of the tweet (i.e., directly before the handle). This ensures this tweet isn't interpreted as a reply by Twitter.*
- *I recommend including a graphic or a link to a relevant article. Tweets with images get twice the engagement than those without.*

### ***How can I engage in a way that's nonpartisan?***

Make your tweets to the candidate focused on the issue, how your community is impacted, and who is most impacted-- and not about them personally or their background. Engage all the candidates in the same manner.

### ***What advice do you have for crafting a compelling message on Twitter about science-based safeguards?***

Be concise, concrete, and clear in your ask. And the more transparent and personal you are in what's at stake for you, the more compelling the tweets will be. Use accessible language—try to avoid jargon. To help build a collective voice around the issue, repost and retweet content from people you want as allies in your outreach. Where local organizations or institution may be supportive, you can tag them to join in sharing their story and work or amplifying your tweets.

Communicate with consistency—the more you post/tweet, the more likely you will be to build a following. That means not being afraid to post about the same subject repeatedly. But change your use of words and pictures to retain the interest of people who have seen previous posts.

#### ***Other resources to be a Twitter-savvy advocate:***

- Watch the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) Science Network webinar "Social Media for Scientists" for more in-depth advice at <https://youtu.be/cXQILih3uY0>.

- Read “What Makes a Good Tweet” on the Hootsuite blog (<https://blog.hootsuite.com/how-to-get-twitter-followers>).

### **Sample Tweets from Diana:**

.[Insert candidate handle here], can I count on your commitment to fulfil Congress’ responsibility of holding the administration accountable for its efforts to cut science out of public protections? and to oppose similar congressional attempts?

.[Insert candidate handle here], will you support communities and our efforts to deal with the impacts of #ClimateChange? How will you help to put the brakes on attempts to rollback science-based environmental protections?

The Trump administration is planning on reconsidering the looking into rolling back air quality protections around standard for ozone, despite the fact that the science clearly shows this will hurt [your city/town’s] communities that doing so would cause harm. [insert candidate handle here], will you stand up to ensure public health and safety is protected? <http://bit.ly/2NF0Cco>

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## **Informational Resources about Attacks on Science-Based Policies and Programs**

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The Center for Science a Democracy (CSD) at UCS has been hard at work in watchdogging the latest attacks and threats to science coming out of the Trump Administration and current Congress, and what that means for the public’s safety.

Leverage the team’s research for useful examples to communicate with candidates what is at stake with the Administration’s onslaught of attacks on science-- and why incoming elected officials need to call out and put a brake on this anti-science agenda:

- [Webpage: UCS’ Attacks on Science tracker](#)
- [Report: Sidelining Science Since Day One](#)
- [Report: Abandoning Science Advice](#)
- [Blog: 11 Times the Trump Administration Quashed Scientific Studies and Data](#)
- [Blog: And Then They Came for the Social Scientists](#)

**Top tip:** *The more concrete and local you can make your message about why your member of Congress needs to protect science-based safeguards, the more likely you’ll get their attention.* That’s why CSD created these two interactive maps where you can look up the following specific health risks exposure to communities in your districts stemming from rollbacks to critical science-based protections:

- [Increased air pollution emissions](#)
- [Low air quality risks from ozone levels](#)

For any questions about the Administration’s latest attacks on science, or how you can effectively engage in the midterm elections, email [sciencenetwork@ucsusa.org](mailto:sciencenetwork@ucsusa.org).

**Tell us about your efforts holding candidates accountable—let us know how it went at [www.ucsusa.org/reportback](http://www.ucsusa.org/reportback).**