

## Raskin Reaches Out To Residents



PHOTO BY GEORGE SMITH

**Congressman Jamie Raskin (D-Md. 8th) spoke with county residents on hot button topics at the Citizen Panel Forum held in the Executive Office Building in Rockville on Saturday, July 20, 2019.**

## Congressman Jamie Raskin speaks on hot button issues, 'Congress should behave like this town hall'

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ROCKVILLE — Congressman Jamie Raskin met with constituents of Maryland's 8th District on July 20 to discuss the results of a government-reform survey and brainstorm solutions the country's political system.

The town hall discussion was part of a nationwide Citizen Panel Initiative that uses an online survey tool to provide participants with arguments for and against hot button issues in the United States.

This 'policymaking simulation' helps participants to make their own recommendations on how they would want their member of Congress to vote.

Saturday's town hall discussion, held in Rockville, was organized by Voice of the People, Common Ground Solutions and the University of Maryland (UMD) School of Public Policy.

Common Ground Solutions is an organization working toward three main goals: improving political discourse, highlighting bipartisan work and coming up with agreeable solutions.

Voice of the People is a nonpartisan organization dedicated to creating citizen panels representative of voters. They create policymaking simulations that help members of Congress understand the issues that are important to the people in their districts.

"This town hall is an experiment in democracy," said Steven Kull, who serves as the director of the Program for Public Consultation within the School of Public Policy at UMD and is president of Voice of the People. "This survey is meant to put participants in the shoes of a policymaker."

Kull explained that the online survey and the town hall discussion followed are both meant to show constituents that there is more consensus on important issues than perceived. Instead of hosting a town hall in which attendees become entrenched in the ideas they came to, the Citizen Panel Initiative is meant to help promote civil dialogue and highlight common ground on difficult issues.

The survey covered topics like campaign finance reform, ranked-choice voting in elections, and income transparency in government, among others.

Harry Schenof, a constituent of Raskin's, noted in the discussion that he was incredibly impressed by the results of the survey.

### Offsetting the Influence of Big Campaign Donors



PHOTO BY GEORGE SMITH

**Congressman Jamie Raskin met with constituents of Maryland's 8th District on July 20 to discuss the results of a government-reform survey and brainstorm solutions for the U.S. political system.**

"I thought the structure was excellent," he said. "I didn't care how long it took; it was good to get the information that was provided."

The survey reportedly took about an hour or more for participants to complete. Each question was written with about a paragraph of information, similar to the information a policymaker might receive before voting on legislation. Then participants were invited to vote on how convincing they felt the argument was.

Martin Beam noted that because of the thoroughness of the information provided the survey seemed a little more honest than other studies that take less time to complete and that rely on push polling.

This Citizen Panel Initiative was the first to feature an elected official in the discussion, according to Kull.

The group discussed the results of the nationwide survey and noted similarities across parties and between Maryland's 8th District and the United States as a whole.

For instance, on issues such as campaign finance reform, results indicated that both Republicans and Democrats were in favor of increasing the disclosure of campaign-related donations. This policy recommendation would allow the president to mandate that federal contractors publicly disclose donations to groups that spend money on campaign-related activities, like campaign advertising.

In Maryland's 8th District, both sides of the aisle were tied at 79% in favor of this legislation. Nationwide results indicated an even-higher favorability for legislation like this; 84% of Republicans and 89% of Democrats were in favor of the idea.

Not all issues saw such similar rates of agreement. For instance, on the topic of congressional redistricting, one proposal would change the way districts are outlined. The shape of a district would be set by a commission of citizens in each state. The districts would need to be geographically natural; have an even distribution of voters who identify as Republican, Democrat and Independent; and accurately reflect the rest of the state according to gender, race and ethnicity.

In this case, the results indicated that in Maryland's 8th District, 76.6% of Democrats favored this proposal, while only 56% of Republicans were in favor. There was a similar distribution when the results were compared to the nationwide results. However, even topics that saw less consensus still showed that there were members of each party in agreement.

During the discussion, Raskin noted that Congress should behave more like this town hall, with nonpartisan information and civil discussions.

"I hope that we can kick something off nationally with this," he said. After the event, Kull said that he thought the town hall went well, citing meaningful dialogue and substantive recommendations from participants.

"So often in town hall meetings people make a lot of personal charges, or it all has a real partisan edge to it, and the goal here is to really get people thinking about the issues and to consider both sides," he said. "I thought the congressman was really recognizing the validity of the concerns, even when they weren't in line with his preferred position."