

Protesters line street as Blunt kicks off Lincoln Days event in Springfield

Harrison Keegan, HKEEGAN@NEWS-LEADER.COM
Feb. 25, 2017

A group of citizens invited U.S. Sen. Roy Blunt to attend a "street town hall" Saturday morning in Springfield.

About 300 people lined John Q. Hammons Parkway at 7 a.m., chanting and holding signs as the Missouri Republican Party's Lincoln Days event got underway at the nearby University Plaza Hotel.



Blunt hosted a breakfast inside, but he did not take the protesters up on their invite outside.

Crystal Brigman Mahaney with Missouri Health Care for All helped organize Saturday morning's protest. She said she also went to Blunt's office two months ago to ask the senator to hold a town hall meeting with constituents.

"There are 300 people out here who want to hear from their senator," Brigman Mahaney said. "They are out here in the early morning in the chilly, chilly weather because health care is really personal and lives are on the line."

Brigman Mahaney said she wants to hear from Blunt about his views on the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid.

Sreekanth Acharya of Springfield attended the protest with a sign that read, "We pay your salary. Do your job."

"Senators need to listen to their constituents," Acharya said. "They need to hold town halls and they need to make sure that they are present to their constituents."

Acharya said he learned about Saturday's event through social media. It was promoted by the group Springfield Indivisible.

Legislators in other parts of the country held raucous town halls this week in which they were confronted by upset constituents, but Springfield-area lawmakers declined to hold town halls.

A Blunt spokesman told the News-Leader this week the senator has held more than 2,000 events in Missouri over the last six years and is regularly available to constituents.

Rachel Goldberg, patient advocate with Planned Parenthood in Springfield, attended Saturday's protest and said she has not had luck trying to contact Blunt.

"I know that many people, like myself, have been trying to get ahold of him via email, writing and we don't get a response," Goldberg said. "That's what brought me out here today."

Goldberg said her message on Saturday was that health care and Planned Parenthood are important to her.

Roxanne Darby said she attended Saturday's protest with three main issues on her mind — health care, education and immigration.

"I just wanted to show up and let Blunt know that we need to talk to him, and we don't really approve of the things he's doing and not doing," Darby said.

Darby said she was impressed with the size of the crowd considering the weather and the early start time.

Cindy Henley attended Saturday's protest with a sign that read: "Hey Roy Blunt. Are you listening?"

Henley said she has been upset since the election in November, and Saturday's event gave her an outlet for her frustration.

"It's something that I can do that is going to make a difference, maybe," Henley said. "It's an action that I can take so that I don't go nuts worrying about where our democracy is going."

Other signs at the protest referenced Russia, the free press, immigration and health care.