

## REP. BEN CLINE'S TOWN HALL, DEC. 2022

This is a report on the town hall that Rep. Cline held on Dec. 16, at Rudy's Restaurant in Shenandoah. We issue this report to keep Page County voters apprised of current political issues and Rep. Cline's views on them.

In summary, Mr. Cline's discussion and responses to questions made clear that he strongly adheres to the far-right positions of the so-called Freedom Caucus and that his thinking adheres to standard, often superficial far-right talking points.

### Us against Them

Mr. Cline routinely referred to "we/us" and "they/them" when referencing Republicans and Democrats. Of course, despite his winning 77% of the 8,207 votes in Page County in November, now that the election ended, he is duty-bound to serve EVERYBODY in our Congressional district, not just Republicans. But he made it clear that he does not view his responsibilities that way. He announced that when "they" take over the House "they" will begin a number of investigations, including going after Hunter Biden with the goal of getting to what he called "The Big Man." Mr. Cline also identified Dr. Fauci as another political target. He questioned continued financial and diplomatic support for Ukraine's war against Russian aggression, promising investigation into that spending.

### Freedom Caucus

Mr. Cline stated that he is a member of the "Freedom Caucus" of the Republican Party and repeatedly criticized both the Senate Minority Leader, Mitch McConnell, and the expected House Majority Leader, Kevin McCarthy, as being too wed to "the Establishment." At one point he joked that the Freedom Caucus views "the enemy" not as Democrats but as the Senate, evidently because fewer Republican Senators are as virulently and strenuously pro-Trump as members of the Freedom Caucus.

### January 6

Mr. Cline at once condemned political violence and simultaneously reiterated that he voted against certifying the Presidential election results because he considered the certified results from Pennsylvania and Arizona as fraudulent. He also expressed concern whether those convicted and incarcerated for those roles in the January 6 insurrection were accorded due process and sufficient constitutional protections before conviction and in prison.

### Climate Change

Out of roughly 25 attendees of the Town Hall, approximately 6 non-Republicans were present, and most asked the congressman questions. One of these Democratic or Independent attendees asked him about climate change. In his typical manner, he deflected and asked the attendee if she believed climate change was the result of human activity and if so by how much. Then he went on to spew the Republican talking points about climate change being part of a normal, natural

pattern. He did not recognize that even if that were true, government is capable of efforts to mitigate the damage from extreme weather events now and into the future.

Mr. Cline stated his perspective on energy sources is an “all of the above” approach (meaning both fossil fuels and renewables), but he emphasized drilling for more fossil fuels, dismissed the idea of banning continued manufacture of cars running on traditional combustion engines (as California has done), and repeatedly dismissed a wide range of legislation and legislative proposals as part of a “radical Green New Deal” Democratic agenda. He also supported harnessing government to enable individuals to discriminate against various groups on the supposed grounds of religious freedom. These views struck many attendees as strange for the party of “small government.”

### Pro-Life?

Other questions concerned his voting against legislative proposals to protect the rights of incarcerated women who are pregnant or experiencing some form of postpartum difficulty. Most Republicans voted yes on this bill with a 324 to 90 vote. However, his basic explanation was to cite a very extreme example about sending these women to what he called a “resort.” However, the bill at issue provided minimum levels of health care and nutrition for the pregnant inmate and her newborn child. The questioner pointed out that his “no” votes seemed to contradict his expressed “pro-life” and “pro-family” values. The contrast between his no votes on this legislation versus his concern for convicted Jan. 6 insurrectionists was striking.

### Fiscal Discipline?

With regard to Cline's opening statement that the new Republican House will work to impose fiscal discipline and cut the budget, a Page County Democrat asked what programs he wanted to cut. Cline said he is sponsoring a bill to cut an agency but he couldn't remember its name. He said that agency was created under Dodd-Frank to regulate aspects of the insurance industry that he claimed duplicates what States already regulate. He then stated that he would abolish the Department of Education and send the federal money now spent on education directly to the states so local school boards could decide how to spend those funds. When the Dem questioner pointed out that that wouldn't cut the federal budget, he acknowledged that was true but pressed his point that the Department of Education needed to be abolished, pushing his applause line.

### Controlling What He Foments

Throughout the session several attendees shouted out slogans along the lines of “stop indoctrinating our kids in schools.” Mr. Cline made no attempt to discourage those outbursts, but at one point seemed concerned that the crowd would get out of control and clearly was uncertain how to deal with that. Despite his ostensible mild manner, however, he continually fed the crowd standard Republican talking points and “red meat.”

### Prescription Drug Costs Fuel Inflation

Another questioner began by pointing out that Cline repeatedly expressed concern about inflation and that one significant contributor to inflation is the high and continually rising cost of

prescription drugs. Yet Cline voted against the law—now in place—empowering Medicare to negotiate over drug prices with pharmaceutical companies, to keep those costs down. On a related matter, some 37 million Americans—probably including many at the town hall—suffer from diabetes and take insulin. However, Cline also voted against another provision to cap insulin prices. The question was whether those votes clash with his concerns over inflation and represent the interest of Page County residents. His responses ranged from superficial and off-target, to unsupported by fact and conclusory. He first said that he's strongly in favor of free markets and therefore opposed to "price controls." The questioner then objected, saying that empowering Medicare to negotiate prices does not amount to "price controls;" in fact, negotiation is at the heart of how business and markets operates. Cline then said the provision injected government too deeply into what should be entirely in the private sector, and that lowering drug prices would impair their quality and cut research, though he didn't offer any factual basis for those conclusions. He also expressed doubt that negotiation would do much to lower drug costs, again without any attempt to provide evidence or reasoning for that opinion.

### Active Shooter Alert

Another Page County Democrat asked Rep. Cline about his NAY vote on H.R. 6538, the "Active Shooter Alert Act of 2022." This resolution created a federal level coordinator to oversee the implementation of access for all law enforcement agencies to the already existing Amber Alert and Emergency Weather Events systems to alert all cellphone users in a specific location that there is an active shooter at that location, and to describe any persons of interest or vehicles that law enforcement are trying to locate in connection with the shooting. His response was stock as he used the same scapegoat logic throughout the evening: If he feels there are already adequate mechanisms in place to deal with the issue, especially at the state and local levels, he votes against it. When asked how many times out of the 2,347 mass shooter events since he took office was some type of targeted messaging system used, he had no idea. When asked what types of current technology law enforcement agencies already have immediate access to, he offered radio and television. The questioner pointed out that in most public places like parades, concerts, and other events it is highly unlikely that many if any of the attendees will be listening to the radio or watching television. The congressman had no retort, but said that once back in his office, he would revisit this subject.