

# ACCOUNTABILITY UTAH

*Where Political Actions Speak Louder than Words*

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## Official-Speak Guide

What does your elected official really mean when he reacts to your attempts to hold him accountable? This guide is designed to aid Citizens in interpreting and understanding common tactics utilized by elected officials to neutralize legitimate Citizen activism.

We have divided common reaction themes into phases, which typically indicate the level of impact the Citizen is having.

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### Phase I: Empty Promises

**Reaction:** "You know, you make a good point. I'll bring that up [in committee or elsewhere]."

**Common Interpretation:** If you show up with a boat load of people to that committee meeting, and they are all glaring at me, there is an outside possibility that I might actually follow through on that promise.

**Potential Response:** Let's work out the details right now so that I can inform your constituents about your upcoming efforts.

**Reaction:** "Give my secretary/intern a call, and we can sit down and discuss that."

**Common Interpretation 1:** Take the shortest possible route straight to hell. I want people standing around us to think that I actually care about your opinion. If my secretary/intern actually makes the mistake of trying to arrange an appointment, I've got a one-minute time slot between my tooth extraction and scheduled arthritis attack.

**Common Interpretation 2:** Sure, we can sit down... next month, when I've already gotten my way with this bill/resolution/issue.

**Common Interpretation 3:** If you do have the guts to call and set an appointment, I'll bring in all my loud-mouthed legislative buddies

to attempt to intimidate and cajole you, lie to you, and completely waste your time and energy.

**Potential Response:** If you're serious, then let's set a time right now. [Never go to the meeting without one or more witnesses!]

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## Phase II: Let Me Condescend for a Moment

**Reaction:** "You just don't understand the political realities," or, "That's not the way we do things around here," or, "It's easy to condemn and complain, but..."

**Common Interpretation:** I'm smarter than you and have infinitely more experience up here than fools and common keyboard jockey riff-raff like you. I am quite comfortable here and will avoid rocking my political boat unless my back is to the wall and you leave me no choice.

**Potential Response:** You did not take a solemn oath to actively defend my rights only when the political winds blow in your favor.

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## Phase III: Appeasement through Access

**Reaction:** "Join my committee and help me draft better legislation next year."

**Common Interpretation:** I want to buy you off with special access privileges to me and my other political operatives. I want to turn you from your cause and make you my personal political advocate. (If nothing else, I will get you off my back so that I can pass this nasty bill and get some political payback from the corrupt interests I made a deal with. Maybe then, I won't need to listen to you at all...)

**Response:** No thanks, though I would be willing to review and critique your ideas in the future. This issue cannot wait until your committee gets together, however. You need to act now.

**Reaction:** "Let's hold a neighborhood meeting in your home."

**Common Interpretation:** I want to buy you off with the prestige and honors you will receive for holding a special meeting in your home. You will actually think you're doing something which will buy me some time.

**Response:** No thanks. I'm here to get this issue resolved now.

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## Phase IV: Helpless Victim of Circumstances

**Reaction:** "The other house won't pass it and the governor will veto it. There's nothing I can do."

**Common Interpretation:** I'm not a fighter (for you) and am afraid of the damage this bill/resolution might cause to my selfish political ambitions. I want you to ignore the fact that, when we want to pass a bill that strips you of your freedom, we run it over and over again—even though we know it won't pass the first time.

**Potential Response:** If your colleagues are unwilling to do the right thing, then it is your job to expose them or be exposed with them.

**Reaction:** "I tried to bring that bill/resolution out of committee."

**Common Interpretation:** I expended no, or relatively no, effort to bring that bill out of committee. But you will have a difficult time proving that to my constituents.

**Potential Response:** What specific actions did you take to bring that bill/resolution out of committee? What motions did you make? Where and when did you make them? Who voted for and against your motions? Who spoke for and against your motions? Where did each member of your house/senate leadership stand? Tell me the nature of any discussions your party caucus held concerning this bill/resolution.

**Reaction:** "I would help you, but my hands are tied."

**Common Interpretation:** My hands are tied... to the special interests that are essentially bribing me to do their bidding. I'm not a fighter for anything other than my own political career.

**Potential Response:** If you will not take substantive action to fight for this issue, then your position on this issue is quite clear.

**Reaction:** "There are some things that just can not be done."

**Common Interpretation:** I know it could be attempted, and might possibly succeed, but it would really hurt my selfish political ambitions.

**Potential Response:** If you will not take substantive action to fight for this issue, then your position on this issue is quite clear.

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## Phase V: Taking Personal Offense

**Reaction:** "How dare you question my integrity!"

**Common Interpretation:** I have no integrity, but I like to put on airs and act all huffy when people call me on it. This reaction also provides me the opportunity to put you on the defensive or finish this conversation quickly without capitulating to your demands.

**Potential Response:** I'm here to get to the truth and move this issue in the direction it needs to go. We can discuss your integrity some other time.

**Reaction:** "How dare you attack me! I was the house/senate sponsor/cosponsor of that bill/resolution!"

**Common Interpretation 1:** I agreed to sponsor/cosponsor that bill in order to make sure that it did not succeed. This allowed me to simultaneously get credit with fools like you and to please the corrupt special interest who were against the bill.

**Common Interpretation 2:** I wanted kudos for running that bill, but I would only have pushed it if the opposition had rolled over and played dead.

**Potential Response:** Then, as the sponsor/cosponsor of that bill, what specific actions did you take to bring that bill/resolution out of committee? What motions did you make? Where and when did you make them? Who voted for and against your motions? Who spoke for and against your motions? Where did each member of your house/senate leadership stand? Tell me the nature of any discussions your party caucus held concerning this bill/resolution.

**Reaction:** "You always focus on the negative. Nothing will ever be good enough for people like you."

**Common Interpretation:** My political career depends upon me maintaining a low and friendly profile with my constituents. I don't like all this focus and attention on my poor performance.

**Potential Response:** If you would stop destroying my rights, I would have no reason to be negative.

**Reaction:** "You just want everyone to stand in a circle and shoot inwards."

**Common Interpretation:** I want you to think that I'm in the same camp as people who work for limited government and that by harming my political career, you will hurt your own cause.

**Response:** I'm sorry you feel that way. Now, back to the issue at hand...

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## Phase VI: Feigned Worry & Concern

**Reaction:** "I'm worried about you."

**Common Interpretation:** ...And what you might do to my political career. I want to make you think I'm actually concerned about you so that you will listen to me and go away.

**Response:** Your concern is not necessary. I'm more worried about you and your performance regarding this critical issue.

**Reaction:** "So-and-so has no credibility up here. You need to stay away from him."

**Common Interpretation:** So-and-so could hurt my political career if enough people listened to him, which is precisely why I and others want to tarnish his reputation.

**Potential Response:** Oh really? Why do you say that exactly? I would be interested in any examples you could give me.

**Reaction:** "I'm worried about so-and-so. I think he might be mentally unstable."

**Common Interpretation:** So-and-so is causing me significant political pain. I know it's a stretch, but I would love to see so-and-so wind up in a mental institution. Maybe if I suggest it, others will slowly grow to believe it. At worst, they will begin to distance themselves from so-and-so.

**Potential Response:** Laughter, followed by an appropriate form of ridicule.

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## Phase VII: You're Only Hurting Your Own Cause

**Reaction:** "If you don't stop, I'm going to purposely vote against your bill/resolution," or, "If you work with this person/organization, we will ignore and discredit you."

**Common Interpretation:** I have absolutely no principles and, given any pressure from my buddies up here, would have voted against you whether you pressured me or not. I'm just hoping to intimidate

you into backing off and leaving me alone. And if by some act of God, I end up hitting the wrong button and voting in your favor, you will think that I did you a favor.

**Potential Response:** I don't respond to extortion. You go ahead and do that. I would rather you vote against the bill/resolution, so the records can show your true nature.

**Reaction:** "How can you do this to the conservative cause?"

**Common Interpretation:** You are exposing the fact that we're a bunch of leftists in sheep's clothing. But I want you to feel that our political careers are in some way tied to the cause of limited government.

**Potential Response:** I'm not doing anything to the cause of conservatism or limited government. I am politically targeting those who claim to be for limited government, but who vote and act against limited government.

**Reaction:** "Why are you attacking so-and-so? He's the greatest conservative we have up here!"

**Common Interpretation:** I want to go on pretending that so-and-so votes consistently for limited government. I want so-and-so to have a free ride whenever he votes to destroy fundamental freedoms and break his oath of office. I'll attempt to make you feel guilt for daring to attack so-and-so.

**Potential Response:** I would rather deal with a hard core leftist who is absolutely true to his philosophy, than a so-called conservative who refuses to fight for my rights and freedoms. At least I can count on the leftist to do what he says he will do.

**Reaction:** "I'm going to tell everyone about you and what you're doing."

**Common Interpretation:** I want you to surrender and stop attacking our little social club up here. I hope to intimidate you with the potential disapproval you could receive from people you think I might know.

**Potential Response:** You can do whatever you want, but I'm not backing down. In fact, when you talk to people, give them my personal contact information and I'll be glad to chat personally with them about this matter.

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## Phase VIII: Attempting to Save Face

**Reaction:** "Keep up the good work."

**Common Interpretation 1:** I'm just glad you aren't attacking me yet and I want it to stay that way.

**Potential Response 1:** I will.

**Common Interpretation 2:** Witty sarcastic statements were never my forte, but I'll throw one out anyway, because I've exhausted all my other tactics on you.

**Potential Response 2:** Look unimpressed.

**Reaction:** "Why don't you run for office then? You seem to think you know everything."

**Common Interpretation:** I know I'm not doing my job and I don't like being reminded of that fact. Besides, I know you don't live in my district.

**Potential Response 1:** Why don't you live up to the oath you took when you were elected to office?

**Potential Response 2:** I feel like I am more effective on the outside right now, holding current elected officials accountable.

**Potential Response 3:** I've been thinking about that. Would you like to endorse me and jump start my campaign with a sizeable donation?

**Reaction:** "You can do that. It's a free country."

**Common Interpretation:** It bugs me to no end that you are free to actually do that to my political career. But I'll act like I'm not scared or agitated in the slightest.

**Potential Response:** Smile and go about your business.

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