



According to a staffer for Sen. Susan Collins, the majority of calls her staff are fielding on the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh have been civil. Angry and frustrated, perhaps. But civil. You'd never know that from recent statements and comments by the senator and her staff.

After months of claiming constituent contact had been sluggish on the issue, Sen. Collins this week publicly acknowledged that she has, in fact, been hearing from us. Unfortunately, she chose to highlight only the calls by some bad actors, leaving the impression that vile messages are the only ones she's received. In truth, not only has most of the contact been civil, her staffer also shared that many calls received after the voicemails were aired on a local newscast Tuesday evening were from Mainers who oppose Kavanaugh who called to say they are appalled at those messages. And we are appalled. But we are also frustrated.

Maine newspapers have published hundreds, maybe thousands, of letters to the editor opposing Kavanaugh. Hundreds of Mainers have visited her district offices in the two months since his nomination; some have even flown to DC to meet with Sen. Collins personally. Thousands have attended nearly a dozen peaceful protests all across the state. Just this week, six groups representing nearly 3,000 Mainers bought ads in three newspapers to run a letter from their members. In less than 24 hours, Herd on the Hill received hundreds of Mainers' letters and delivered them to her D.C. office on Tuesday. Hundreds more will be delivered today. To make these Herculean efforts and be told we're not being heard is infuriating and insulting.

Scholars who study this kind of thing say that civic engagement is at a record high. That's a GOOD thing. Our government functions better when its citizens take an active role and we suspect the senator would agree with that. There's an opportunity here for Sen. Collins to applaud that increased civic engagement, to thank her constituents for paying such careful attention to policy, legislation, and nominations and for sharing our concerns with her through all means available to us. She can draw attention to the thousands of her constituents who have peacefully exercised their first amendment rights instead of drawing attention to the vile comments left by some, many of whom may not even be Mainers.

Collins' recent statements imply that the only people she's hearing from are those who threaten interns over the phone. That's not Maine. That's not us. And that's not representative of who's calling, writing, and showing up. The Kavanaugh nomination will come to an end, soon, one way or the other. But there will be other nominations. Other bills. Other policies. Other actions and events constituents will want to weigh in on. We ask the senator to lay the groundwork now to shape the tenor for those future conversations in a positive way. Stop holding up the bad apples and instead hold up the good ones. Doing that will not win her the support of people who disagree with her votes. But it might win her their respect.