

Health-care talk, but no shouting

*Nov. 25, 2009 12:00 AM
The Arizona Republic—Lead Editorial*

When an issue is prompting people to bite off each other's fingers and push each other into oncoming traffic, you know you've got a hot one.

Like health-care reform. Dare utter the words, and the rage begins.

Or . . . maybe not.

An earnest group of citizens, organized optimistically as "Project Civil Discourse," plans to present a novel take on the health-care debate: They seek to discuss the subject among people who disagree . . . without shouting.

"Our message to all of these (interest) groups is that it is important to discuss these issues without shouting," said former Maricopa County Superior Court Judge Bruce Meyerson. "We have no objective of reaching any consensus. It's more about understanding the issue."

Scheduled for Tuesday at the AE England Building in Civic Park in downtown Phoenix, "Speaking, Not Shouting: A Community Conversation About Health Care Reform" appears to be an experiment in civil interaction as much as it is a discussion of the various health-care reform alternatives.

Among those planning presentations are representatives of St. Luke's Health Initiatives, as well as a professor of health law and ethics from the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at Arizona State University.

Among the 21 organizers, meanwhile, are many groups dedicated to conflict resolution and civil discourse. They include the Arizona Association for Conflict Resolution and the Arizona Association of Facilitators, as well as the Maricopa Community Colleges Center for Civic Participation.

In short, these are organizations whose missions seem pretty much perfect for the difficult task of keeping people's fists unclenched while talking health-care reform.

As in traditional town halls, participants in "Speaking, Not Shouting" will divide into small groups and discuss specific aspects of the topic. Among the anticipated questions:

- Should all Americans have access to a basic or minimum level of health-care services?
- How do we balance individual rights with the community's interest in managing public-health issues and controlling health-care costs?
- What is the proper role of government in regulating costs related to health care?

Is it conceivable that a debate on this volatile subject can come to conclusion without a lot of shouting? Without finger biting?

We'll see.