

The Arizona Republic, December 16, 2009

A calm conversation on health care

A civil health-care town hall? No, it's not an oxymoron.

In your Nov. 25 editorial describing "Speaking, not shouting, A community conversation about health-care reform," you asked, "Is it conceivable that a debate about this volatile subject can come to conclusion without a lot of shouting?"

Well, the answer is in; it actually happened here in downtown Phoenix on Dec. 1.

Sixteen organizations, many of whom are partners in Project Civil Discourse, sponsored a discussion with over 130 in attendance. There was no shouting, no rude behavior. To the contrary, in the words of one participant, the evening was "one of the most amazing venues I've ever attended. I can hardly wait for the next one!"

Comments from many others show powerfully that it is possible to structure a discussion around a controversial subject in a way that promotes understanding, knowledge and respect for differing views.

We know that the hyperpartisanship and polarizing rhetoric we witness every day damages the fabric of our democracy. Our event teaches that it is possible to bring together people with divergent views and come away with greater and deeper understanding of those differences, and even respect for those who disagree with us.

In words spoken by an English aristocrat 300 years ago, we know that "civility costs nothing and buys everything." - **Bruce E. Meyerson, Phoenix.** *The writer is a board member of the Arizona Humanities Council.*