



Why can't we all just get along?

I just got through a good portion of a day of watching President Obama's "town hall" presentation and Q-and-A in New Hampshire, Sen. McCaskell's town hall Q-and-A in Missouri, and Sen. Spector's town hall Q-and-A in Pennsylvania, all about potential health care reform pending in the Congress.

It was amazing to me the notable difference between the first meeting and the latter two, particularly the *love fest* in Missouri. Forget the fact that you (or I) may agree or disagree on certain points or positions of the respective main speakers on this extremely important topic. What is interesting is the apparent compelling need of certain elements of our society to disrupt and to exhibit loud and enraged disgust to express their opposition to the other side of the debate, instead of engaging in an intellectual discussion over what is the best course of action for ourselves, our kids and this country. I believe that something so important as this issue (and others) deserves critical analysis and calm discussion over the relative fears, concerns and reasons for support of any proposals.

Yet a certain segment of the participants in two out of the three events apparently felt a compelling need to display total disdain for any semblance of respect for the democratic dialogue necessary to that discussion.

Why? Well, one possibility is that a certain number of them listen to the preaching of talk show hosts, who enjoy the convenience (as do politicians somewhat, during a speech) of making assertions designed to rally the vulnerable without support of documented facts to support their positions, with the political and/or ego-driven motivation of being able to influence minions, without themselves being questioned on something important to any debate, called "facts." Paraphrasing: "Never let facts get in the way of progress."

Of course, one man's (or woman's) "progress" is another person's blasphemy. It's pretty easy to promote an agenda on one's own talk show without opposition. It ain't that easy to support a position when offering *anyone* the chance to take an opposing position in a face-to-face dialogue, whether respectful to another's opposing view or not, and whether or not doing so risks facing the opposition that can be either insightful and fact-based or predicated on fringe lunacy that is fear-based.

Yet the beat goes on. One side talks about death squads for elders, the government intruding and controlling the

health care portion of their lives. Others respond that the insurance industry is controlling the debate to protect its ability to decide who gets covered by health insurance and who doesn't, based somewhat on pre-existing conditions (relevant or not to the malady presently existing). It wants the ability to set ground rules based on the company's ability to make huge profits and expand the wages of the power elite, while the wages of the covered remain stagnant.

Who do you want with the power to govern your ability to obtain health coverage, the United States government, the representatives of which you can vote in or out of office, or the insurance industry, which you have no control over? What if the former option includes individuals' power to choose their own doctor and their own health plan? Seems pretty simple to me.

How does this affect postal employees and postal retirees? Part of the NALC's ability to negotiate coverage and premiums of the NALC's health plan is predicated on what goes on in the health insurance industry. Approximately one-eighth of all Americans are not covered by a health plan. Would you like it if an eighth of letter carriers were not covered by health insurance? Would you like it if your health insurance premiums escalated to match the exorbitant premiums paid by those who have health coverage outside the government? Probably not.

Do you enjoy the fact that the medical costs for treating uncovered Americans are transferred to you in the form of increased health premiums? Do you like the fact that "wellness," the concept of encouraging good health through education to increase the chance that people will not sustain illnesses they would otherwise experience, thus reducing the cost of health insurance, is not considered by many as a legitimate strategy? Legitimate fodder, along with numerous other questions, to be considered by anyone who takes the health insurance debate seriously.

The end result of this debate, however, as important as it will be, may be overshadowed by how we got there. Part of that road will be filled by the debate and those town hall meetings. Whether or not a debate is held in a respectful or in a disruptive atmosphere depends on those who desire to feed knowledge and understanding versus the desire to confirm preconceived fears and to stoke hatred for anyone who believes differently. But that's part of democracy. ☒