Healthcare Reform

Challenge:
“It is really mind boggling that we are such an advanced country, we promote democracy but we can’t really provide health care when all these other equivalent countries do that. How do you do that?”

“One of the main concerns I have with a ‘universal, everybody is in the same boat’ solution is then rationing starts to become an issue.”

“I think all children should have some sort of basic health care, and then we had some discussion about elder care too and to what extent we want to insure that all elderly people have care. That really is the mark of society, can you take care of your children and your elder people?”

These quotes represent a just few of the many concerns citizens hold when considering national health care reform. With so many diverse perspectives on an emotionally charged issue, how can citizens possibly come together to discuss their views on health care reform to ensure the best possible solution is reached?

Solution:
The Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy (ICDD) has already taken the steps necessary to address this difficult challenge. The above quotations were actually taken from a forum led by ICDD. Participants in the forum included students, parents, former military personnel, health care administrators, senior citizens, a physician, a small-business owner, a teacher and a professor.

ICDD welcomed Kansans to attend one of eight health-care forums held between October 2008 and January 2009 in Abilene, El Dorado, and Manhattan, KS. The forums were led by non-partisan moderators. Moderators facilitate discussion by encouraging full participation, mutual understanding, and a respectful environment. Most importantly moderators promote a sense of shared responsibility among all participants to define their goals, and to prescribe solutions for addressing their goals.

ICDD modeled the forums after the National Issues Forums. Participants considered the following topics regarding health care: reducing the threat of financial ruin, restraining out-of-control costs and providing coverage as a right. The purpose of the forums was not to find a right or wrong answer: just to gain as much information from the public as possible, and to present the public’s viewpoint to policy-makers.

Results:
Approximately 200 people participated in the forums. ICDD presented their participants’ feedback in a health-care hearing overseen by a panel including: Dr. Roger Reitz, a Kansas state senator and physician; Barbara Langner, policy director for the Kansas Health Policy Authority; Jim McLean, vice president for public affairs for the Kansas Health Institute; Chad Austin, vice president of government relations for the Kansas Hospital Association.

Two graduate students presented the forum’s findings. Maintaining their non-partisanship, one graduate student argued the public is ready for change while the other student argued the opposite. Both students used participant quotes as evidence for their claims. After presenting their findings, a verdict was reached by the judging panel: ultimately, Kansas has not reached enough common ground to act on health care reform. While Kansans agree they are in a state of crisis regarding health care, they are not ready to grapple with the trade-offs, such as cost and accessibility. The results of the final forum contributed to a Kettering Foundation report which was forwarded to senate staffers in June 2009.