



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on August 7, 2009

Healthcare Debate Turmoil

At most public gatherings focused on President Barack Obama's healthcare reform proposals, Americans have expressed their strong feelings in a peaceful and civil manner. However, on August 6, town hall meetings in Tampa, Florida, and St. Louis, Missouri, got out of hand and led to several arrests. Fox News reported on August 7 that police intervened to restore order, and St. Louis officers made six arrests, including some for assault.



An estimated 1,500 people showed up in the Tampa suburb of Ybor City for a meeting with Democratic State Representative Betty Reed and U.S. Representative Kathy Castor. As Fox News put it, "the larger-than-expected crowd gathered outside the Hillsborough County Children's Board building, where several hundred people, most of whom opposed a government health care plan, began to loudly chant and scuffle with organizers posted at doorways after the auditorium filled to capacity."

A freelance videographer became involved in an altercation and ended up with his camera equipment and glasses being damaged. Another man had his shirt partially torn off and was treated for minor injuries.

In Mehlville, Missouri, Democratic Representative Russ Carnahan held a forum on aging that drew activists from both sides of the healthcare debate. After things took a turn for the worse, police arrived and made arrests. According to Fox News: "One conservative activist, interviewed at a local emergency room where he was being treated for injuries, said he was attacked by some of the individuals who were arrested as he passed out 'Don't tread on me' flags."

Democratic Representative John Dingell's forum in Romulus, Michigan, became heated as those for and against healthcare reform argued with each other. A man who came with his son in a wheelchair shouted at Dingell. When House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited a homeless clinic in Denver, Colorado, she encountered similar fireworks.

Those opposing President Obama's healthcare reform efforts seemed to be expressing their frustration at being ignored by Washington lawmakers. In Tampa, there were shouts of "You work for us!" "Tyranny! tyranny! tyranny!" and "Read the bill!" Karen Jaroch, a homemaker and organizer for the 9-12 Project, said, "They're hiding from their constituents," and added that Castor "works for us and needs to listen."



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The fiery nature of the debate over healthcare reform is almost certainly being made worse by the unnecessarily accelerated pace that President Obama is setting. Constituents cannot help but feel that lawmakers are ramming reform down their throats with no time for debate or consideration of opposing viewpoints. Then again, those who oppose healthcare reform as envisioned by Obama would do well to keep things civil. Senators and representatives are already scaling back their town halls and opportunities for public debate for fear of potential violence. Opponents will only limit their chances to express their opinion if they allow things to degenerate into shouting matches and violence.

As strange as it may sound, the only side of the debate that benefits from shouting and shoving is the pro-Obama side. It is conceivable that supporters of the president's reform proposals could be taking steps to make the anti-Obama side look bad. What better way than either to encourage genuine anti-Obama protestors to be loud and obnoxious, to show up and pretend to be anti-Obama protestors who are acting unruly, or to hire people to act as anti-Obama protestors who behave like jerks. This is not to say that such deception is necessarily taking place, since we don't know, but just to make clear that while the uproar against President Obama's reform is genuine, anything that makes opponents of his proposals look bad will only serve to hasten passage of current reform legislation.

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