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Sharon Fuller: America In One Room

BY SHARON FULLER 11 hrs ago

This experiment actually happened. From Sept. 19 to 22, the nonpartisan institution Helena convened America in One Room. It brought together a national sample of more than 500 registered voters from all over the United States, recruited by an independent, nonpartisan research institution, NORC at the University of Chicago.

This is a well-tested process we call “deliberative polling.” It combines a meticulously conducted conventional poll with face-to-face discussion in depth, followed by a second poll. It will tell us: What would the people really think under the best practical conditions for pondering the issues? Which candidates have support on what issues after the people have had the chance to think about them and discuss them in a civil fashion? Who supports who on what policies and why?

This experiment in democratic reform has been tried 108 times since 1994 in 28 countries. Every place it has been applied, whether in Texas on wind power, Bulgaria on the education of the Roma, Japan on pension reform, South Korea on nuclear power or Uganda on education and health care in rural areas, it has had constructive effects in clarifying the public’s considered judgments.

I had the opportunity to attend this Historic event as a delegate from Vermont. There was one other person from VT, but I unfortunately didn’t get to meet them. I did meet Andrew Raymond from Hawaii who is originally from the Barre area and familiar with from Joe’s Pond. (It really is a small world).

I took the poll prior to being selected and the same poll once the conference was over.

I went in thinking that my responses when repeating the survey would not change. I was very wrong. We discussed such issues as health care, immigration, foreign policy, environment, and economy and taxes. There were experts from each of these fields and some of the political candidates from the presidential race.

I met so many wonderful, amazing people. Our group was very diverse we had an immigrant from Russia and one from Africa. A psychologist from Chicago, a retired teacher from California. The age group spanned as did our political opinions. We discussed the issues with the help of our moderator in a very civil respectful fashion. Everyone's voice and opinion was heard. Ultimately we all came away friends and have all decided to stay connected via email text etc. There was such a bonding with all of us even though our views were so different. We all agreed we would do it again if we could have our same group.

We are all Americans and I really think we all want what is best for country even though our opinions on how to get there differ.

I came home empowered and enlightened. No issue is black or white. There is a middle ground. I must say prior to this experience I did tend to view things either black or white without even realizing it. My eyes where opened. If I find an issue I am passionate about I will take the information bombarded at us from any and all media outlets and research the facts so I can make an informed decision.

Sadly no matter which media outlet you watch they will spin the news in one direction or other, so we really are not getting the real facts and it's vital that we research on each topic to find the true facts.

You now will begin to hear more about this event in the news media. If anyone gets the NY Times pictures of all the delegates will be in there and I would love a copy. CNN has already posted the first of many videos. My understanding is that there will be some on You Tube and PBS and in the next year a documentary on Netflix.

I'm very excited to hear the end results which will be posted in the news. I would love to see this kind of experiment happen on a local level. I would love to see this happen at the Congress as well, however there would need to be a non-bipartisan moderator to be sure that the attendees treat each other with respect and kindness which doesn't happen now. Every voice should be heard as we all have something of value to share. If we could just come together and find that middle ground so much could be resolved.



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