

# Times-Republican

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## **My time in America in One Room**

I had the privilege of being one of 526 people at America in One Room. This event brought together registered voters from 47 states, a mosaic of skin tones, a variety of ages, economic realities and the entire political spectrum. It was an experiment in “*deliberative polling.*”

We each received a 56-page briefing book that we were asked to read prior to arriving. It contained background information on the five areas of focus: Economy and Taxes, Healthcare, Environment, Immigration and Foreign Policy. Each area showed specific proposals to be discussed with both arguments for and against.

We were put into group of 12-15 with a moderator, where we spent an hour and a half at a time discussing issues. Each of the 40 groups had to submit two questions per session. We also attended plenary sessions. Five of those with presidential candidates and the other five with panels of experts. Some of us presented questions at each plenary.

The purpose was to see if Americans had more information about the issues and if we sat across the table to discuss these issues in depth would it change the way we vote. We each took a survey to be chosen and on Sunday morning we took the same survey. Would the answers be the same? Would we move on the scale of 0-10?

I didn't know what to expect. Would I be listened to? Would I see the angry, combative attitudes often portrayed in the media? Answer Yes, I was heard. No, I didn't see any screaming or fighting. Did we have very different ideas about the direction this country should head? Yes, but we listened to each other respectfully. We asked questions, shared deeply and got to know one another as human beings.

I'm not sure if all the other groups had our experience, but Group 9 was amazing. I have new friends. Some of us will stay connected. I have a new understanding about racial bias, things that impact coastal regions differently than the Midwest and the complex realities of immigration and healthcare.

As I texted group 9 this morning:

*“One week ago we were strangers traveling across the nation to converge on Dallas for a unique event. One week ago I wondered if I would be heard. One week ago I met some amazing people. Thanks so much for saying yes and setting aside your “real life” for four days. Thanks so much for letting me in.”*

I am so thankful to have been chosen, challenged and changed.

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