The current Presidential campaign appears to have reached a new low in terms of the quality of public discourse and civility. Both candidates, as well as the electorate, are angry and are resorting to name calling and personal attacks. Is this the way to find solutions to the many problems our country is facing? Are there better ways our leaders can engage with their constituents?

This is exactly what UCR professor Kevin Esterling has been studying. His primary focus has been on the often confrontational “town hall meetings” between members of the U.S. Congress and their constituents. Can these events be designed in a way to make them informative, interactive, and productive? Esterling will discuss how the setting or design of a town hall is a powerful determinant of how constituents and their representatives communicate with each other. He will identify methods to convert unconstructive to constructive conversations as well as the differences and similarities in effective design for both in-person and online town halls. What his research shows is that you can take the same people, put them in one town hall setting and they are destructive, but put them in a different setting and they will be constructive.

Dr. Kevin Esterling has been a member of the UCR faculty since 2003. His research focuses on deliberative democracy in American national politics and identifies the conditions that lead citizens to engage constructively in public discourse. His most recent book is The Political Economy of Expertise: Information and Efficiency in American National Politics. Dr. Esterling’s work has been funded by the National Science Foundation and by the MacArthur Foundation.

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Louis Vandenberg
General Manager, KUCR Radio

“How Can We Talk About Important Policy Issues Without Yelling At Each Other?”

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Interim Dean, UCR Graduate Division
Professor of Political Science and Public Policy

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