

*Posted at 5:08 p.m. Monday*

U.S. House Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer will hold a town hall meeting on federal health care reform next week, giving citizens a chance to ask questions and speak their mind about the controversial

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The forum will be held Sept.

1 at North Point High School.

Parking will not be allowed on North Point grounds until 5 p.m. Doors will open at 6 p.m. and attendance will be on a first-come, first-served basis. The event will begin at 7 p.m.

Although the school gym can accommodate nearly 5,000 people, capacity will be limited to 1,000 "to have the most productive town hall," said Stephanie Lundberg, a spokeswoman for Hoyer.

In town hall meetings nationwide this month, public criticism of the reform proposals has mounted and opponents have gained momentum in their efforts to topple one of President Obama's top priorities. Some of the forums have featured heated confrontations between members of Congress and their constituents.

Charles County Republican Club President Mike Phillips believes the crowd will be tilted in favor of health care reform supporters. He also expects Hoyer will "discount anything the opposition has to say because he's already labeled us as 'un-American.'"

Opponents have used a statement in an Aug. 10 op-ed published in USA Today written by Hoyer and U.S. House Speaker Nancy S. Pelosi as a rallying cry. In it, the lawmakers said, "Drowning out opposing views is simply un-American. "

Hoyer (D-Md., 5th) is hopeful that the 90-minute meeting will be both constructive and civil, Lundberg said.

"If you look at all the town halls that have been held, there have been people both for and against health care reform and we don't expect that this will be any different," she said. "Certainly, there are also a lot of people who have questions on what health reform will mean and certain provisions of the bill, so we hope this will provide an opportunity to address some of the outstanding questions."

maryland and parts of Anne Arundel and Prince George's counties.

Hoyer will offer opening remarks, but a significant amount of the 90-minute session will be allotted for attendees to ask questions, Lundberg said.

Attendance will not be limited to 5th District residents, Lundberg said, but the hope is Hoyer's constituents will comprise a large percentage of the crowd.

The public will be permitted to demonstrate within a designated area, Charles County Public Schools' spokeswoman Katie O'Malley-Simpson said. No signs or placards will be allowed inside the school, she said.

A girls' volleyball scrimmage was the only school activity that had to be relocated as a result of the town hall meeting. Parking will be restricted on school grounds before 5 p.m. so it will not disrupt other after-school activities and athletic practices.

"They're really just using our facility and we're facilitating that in any way we can," O'Malley-Simpson said.

Hoyer's office has also coordinated a plan with the Charles County Sheriff's Office to help direct traffic and provide crowd control and additional security if needed.

Sheriff's office spokeswoman Diane Richardson would not elaborate on any security plans, but said the disturbances at previous town hall meetings was taken into consideration.

But Phillips said he and other opponents plan to be well-represented and convey a strong message.

"What we need to do is come together on the same page to that town hall meeting and show ourselves as civil and responsible voters with an argument of opposition and present ourselves in a respectable [manner]," he said

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