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U. Maryland Students Show Up for Obama-- not Health Care Reform

Why are college kids oblivious to the details of President Obama's push to reform health care?


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Editor's note: This is the campus perspective provided by our partners at UWire.com. The author Joel Cohen is a student at the University of Maryland.

College Park, Md. — If a law had the potential to directly affect your life while costing the nation a smidge

less than a trillion dollars, would you pay attention? Of course.

Then why are college kids oblivious to the details of President Obama's push to reform health care?

After attending Thursday's health care rally at the University of Maryland, the student attendees generally were enthralled with being in the presence of the president — and could have seemingly cared less about what he was talking about.

Sure, the president gave his pitch to the friendly crowd on the liberal campus. He stressed the notion that under his plan, young adults would be able to stay on their parents' health insurance plan until age 26 (maybe because, as my friend joked, there won't be any jobs available for graduates in the near future...). And he dismissed opponents' arguments that his plan would add to the debt, saying "most of this plan can be paid for by finding savings within the existing health care system."

But as I walked around soliciting students' opinions of Obama's health plan, few could explain in detail specific reasons why they liked it or why it was a necessary reform even though they're at the heart of 18 to 29 demographic, which polls show is the most supportive group of the legislation.

Even fewer students could describe details of the public option proposal-- despite the fact that they had vehemently cheered for just that minutes before.

"The bill seems so complicated, I don't even want to try to figure it out," said Mike Moore. The University of Maryland junior government and politics major added that his statistics class is more than enough decoding for one day.

Now don't get me wrong: there were some students who understood the plan, such as Michelle McGrain. "My mom's in the health care field, so she's seen the problems firsthand," said the junior University of Maryland student. "While Obama's plan isn't perfect, from what I've see, it's a start."

But students like Michelle were few and far between.

And experts say our generation is effectively getting screwed by the bill, as we're being forced to buy insurance even though we're relatively healthy, to subsidize older Americans' plans.

"Young people are probably one of the groups that's going to come out the worst on this," Michael Tanner, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, told the Los Angeles Times. "They're going to pay more in the short term because they're going to have to go out and buy health insurance. And they're going to pay more in the long term."

Despite our naiveté, I was impressed by the steps Obama is taking to include college students in the discussion.

According to the Department of Health and Human Services, 17 percent of college students do not have insurance. Some universities, currently 22 percent, including the University of Maryland, have enacted rules requiring mandatory health insurance for all incoming freshman-- a fact Obama discussed in his speech. And by including the provision that college students' coverage will extended beyond graduation, he has shown that he is committed to improving our situation.

But it was obvious that students and other guests at today's rally weren't interested in seeing a health care speech, rather, they were more interested in positioning themselves for that elusive presidential handshake.

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