

Guest column: Starting with students

By Amy Hartman

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In response to the staff editorial in the Sept. 18 Diamondback titled, "Healthy Discussion" and in response to President Barack Obama's request last Thursday to bring about health care reform in this country, the University of Maryland College Democrats along with MaryPIRG, Community Roots and Organizing for America, are today launching a health care reform campaign called "Generations United for Health Reform."

An overwhelming majority of younger people in this country, age 18 to 29, are fully in support of health reform, but are not as engaged in the health care debate as our elders. Our elders, specifically our parents and grandparents, are also not as supportive of health care reform as we are. It is our job as young people in support of health care reform to bridge the generation gap.

But before we tell our parents and grandparents why they should support health care reform, we need to know why we support health care reform. The past few weeks, I have been asked numerous times by students, "Why should I, as a young person, care about health care reform?" It's a valid question as we don't tend to think of younger people such as ourselves as the ones who usually get sick and need health insurance. However, young adults between the ages of 19 and 29 make up nearly one-third of the uninsured population. In fact, young people have the highest uninsured rate of any age group.

While many college students are still covered under their parents' employers' health care plans, finding affordable coverage becomes more and more difficult for young adults as we begin our careers and establish financial independence. The myth that health care coverage doesn't affect young people is simply not true. In fact, our age group may be affected the most.

So maybe you're fully in support of health care reform, you got up at 5 a.m. last Thursday to see Obama speak about reform and you've briefly talked about the issue of health care in one of your classes. But what happens when you go home this weekend and your mom asks you to explain the public option, or your grandfather wants to know what exactly end-of-life counseling means? You're stuck.

This is where our campaign comes in. Health care reform is undoubtedly a complicated issue. We want to help you learn the basics of health care reform and arm you with the talking points and strategic arguments you need to effectively advocate for health care reform among your parents and grandparents.

How are we going to do this? The campaign will be holding a "teach-in" on Wednesday, Sept. 30, at 7 p.m. in the Art-Sociology Building, room 1213.

We will have several experts and doctors there to speak about the issue and to equip you with the necessary tools in order to advocate for reform. Additionally, we are today launching our website, generationsunitedforhealthreform.org, on which you can find fact sheets, articles and other resources to learn more about the issue.

Quality, affordable health care coverage is not a privilege reserved for just a portion of our country's population. It is a civil right that the 47 million uninsured people in this country deserve. As Obama said last Thursday in his address to the student body, "It begins right here in College Park. It begins on campuses like this one. It always has. Just like the change that began in our campaign, it starts with people, especially young people, who are determined to take this nation's destiny into their own hands."

Let's take reform into our own hands and make quality, affordable health care available for all.

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