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Protestors Greet Cardin's Health Care Discussion

### 'Town Hall' Meeting Attracts Protestors From Both Sides

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**TOWSON, Md.** -- Hundreds of people on both sides of the health care debate turned out, inside and outside a town hall meeting Monday at Towson University.

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Maryland members of the Health Care for America Now coalition held a counter-rally before the meeting hosted by Sen. Ben Cardin, one of many being put on nationwide as protests grow over reforms Congress will consider after its summer break. A meeting in St. Louis last week ended with six arrests.

The insurance industry said it supports health care reform but not a proposal for an optional, government-run insurance plan it said would bankrupt insurers, hospitals and doctors.

Democrats said it would create competition and cut costs.

About 500 people were allowed inside Tuesday night's meeting, where frayed tempers often interrupted the debate. Cardin had to stop speaking several times because the crowd was so loud.

Outside, the opinions were just as strong.

"You want (health care) to be more efficient and you want it to be cheaper. So you want the government to do it? Come on, Katrina, Medicare, Medicaid, anyone?" said Rob Baranoski.

Those nearly wiped out by health care costs believe there's a better way than the current system.

"Without a government-run plan, we would be in serious trouble, because the insurance companies dump you as soon as you start to cost them money," said Phyllis Zolotorow.

Cardin's staff asked for RSVP's to the meeting. A press aide said the number of people who responded was two to three times more than the Towson Center could hold.

"It's something people have a lot of strong views about. I think people will be respectful. That's all we ask -- to be respectful of other people in the room. Let everyone have a chance to get their points across

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**"You want (health care) to be more efficient and you want it to be cheaper. So you want the government to do it?"**

- Rob Baranoski

so we can have the maximum number of questions and answers," Cardin told 11 News before the meeting.

Cardin made it clear he is for health care reform.

"The only option I hope that's not on the table is the status quo," Cardin said.

Protesters chanted and carried signs that read, "No socialized medicine"; "Public option is no option"; "Health care can't wait" and "Health care is a right."

Larry Serra of Monkton is self-employed at a small company that makes products for teak furniture. He said he showed up because he's "sick and tired of government growing by leaps and bounds, taking over every aspect of our lives."



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Jeff Werner of Hagerstown said, "I like having my own choice."

He said his company's plan costs \$5,000 a year and covers 90 percent of his health care costs. He's afraid the Obama reforms would take that away.

Werner has two sons, ages 14 and 8, he's worried that with the reforms being proposed by Congress, his current option would go away.

"You do have to have some reform. But that doesn't mean you take away our choice," he said.

Phil Pascoe, of Baltimore, just lost his job in sales at AT&T. He is vice president of Local 2107 for the Communication Workers of America and said health care reform is needed.

"We're paying too much money and getting very little for it," he said. Pascoe wasn't sure that the government insurance option was the answer, but "we need to do something and we need to do it now."

Sean Dobson, 45, of Silver Spring, director of Progressive Maryland, rejected arguments that the government option would drive private insurers out of business.

"That's crazy. Nobody says the library drives the bookstores out of business," Dobson said, adding that those arguments were being made by insurers looking to maintain their monopoly.

The Maryland Freedom Coalition urged its followers to go to support its tax tea party goals and to tell Cardin "no" to the president's health care reform push. The coalition was organized by Ellen Sauerbrey, a conservative Republican who ran unsuccessfully twice for governor.

**"These aren't going to be town halls but**

Another tea party group -- Americans for Prosperity -- pushed its followers to show up and did ask that protesters be respectful.

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I'm pretty sure."**

- Political analyst **Matthew  
Crenson**

On the other side, the group Progressive Maryland said it planned to protest the protesters, and its rallying call to followers was to face down the right wing and win health care reform.

Maryland members of the Health Care for America Now coalition also planned a counter-rally against reform opponents.

"These aren't going to be town halls but shouting matches, I'm pretty sure," said political analyst Matthew Crenson.

Crenson said he believes the health care debate has rubbed raw broader sore spots -- anger from those who didn't support the president in the November election and anti-government sentiment.

"It's a continuation or re-eruption of something that's been there all along. Some political scientists call it anti-government nationalism -- people who are proud American patriots but hate their government," Crenson said.

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