

Obama reforms find Isle support

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Local organizers for President Obama yesterday delivered 6,000 signatures to the state's congressional delegation from people who declared their support for the president's health care reform plan.

The signature gathering was part of a national effort by Organizing for America, a project of the Democratic National Committee, to build momentum for health care reform and counter some of the conservative opposition that has surfaced at town

hall meetings.

State Sen. Josh Green, D-3rd (Kohala, Kona, Ka'u), a Big Island doctor who favors the reform plan, accused opponents of spreading fear at town hall meetings, including one hosted on Tuesday night by Honolulu City Councilman Charles Djou, who is running in the Republican primary for Congress in urban Honolulu's 1st Congressional District.

"As a doctor I see people every day, in the emergency department, and they have real fear," Green said. "Fear that is not this phony town hall fear that's been generated. They have fear that they can't get care for their kids. They have a child with asthma, and they don't know whether they can afford to go to the emergency department.

"That's fear."

Jonah Ka'auwai, the chairman of the state GOP, said Green and other majority Democrats are only listening to constituents who support the president's reform plan and have tuned out dissenting voices.

"For him to criticize the people that came there? These are people who have an opinion and have a voice to give," Ka'auwai said. "From our standpoint, it makes it obvious for the people of Hawai'i that, whether it's on the Big Island or it's in Congress, these Democrats and this representation is not looking out for the best of the people of Hawai'i."

President Obama has described several principles for health care reform, including guaranteed coverage, a public option from the federal government that would provide an alternative to private insurance, and cost containment through disease prevention and improvements to Medicare. The actual legislation, however, is being drafted by Congress through five competing bills.

The state's congressional delegation wants an exemption in the final bill for the state's Prepaid Health Care Act of 1974, which requires companies to provide health insurance to employees who work at least 20 hours a week.

Eric Crawley, who is retired from the military and lives in Pearl City, said voters who elected Obama last year knew he wanted health care reform and are now waiting for Congress and the president to deliver.

"We're waiting for the delivery," said Crawley, one of the Obama organizers, describing the sentiment. "We're waiting for the things that you promised during the campaign. We gave you a huge majority in the House, a huge majority in the Senate, and you are now president.

"We've spoken. We want these things delivered. We want it fixed."

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