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Health care reform advocates rally in Bloomington
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There was a skull and crossbones pictured on the picket sign Malcolm Brown held above his head Thursday evening.

“Warning,” the retired Indiana University professor’s sign read. “For-profit health insurance companies are hazardous to your health.”

Brown’s message — and similar messages from about 100 people at a pro-health care reform rally near Indiana University’s Memorial Stadium — was intended for more than just the drivers headed home. People at the rally hoped politicians in Washington, D.C., were listening, too.

“I work in that safety net that we hear about,” said Dr. Rob Stone, an emergency room physician at Bloomington Hospital who attended the rally. Every day, he sees people long overdue for medical help, he said. “I see it all the time. We have got to do something.”

Meaningful reform could help cut rising health care costs and increase access for patients, Stone said.

The rally was not impromptu. Instead, it was part of a national campaign organized Health Care for America Now and two large labor unions, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees and the AFL-CIO.

The groups have been road-tripping across the country in a giant green RV to raise support for health care reform. On Friday, the RV travels to Indianapolis, where organizers hope 1,000 people will show up for a rally.

It is time to strike because the reform iron is hot, said Blaine Rummel, a Washington, D.C.-based AFSCME spokesman who is riding cross-country. “Now we are in the end game of the health care fight,” Rummel said. “The next 100 days matter more than the last 100 years in this debate.”

Local politicians, including state Rep. Matt Pierce and Bloomington City Council President Andy Ruff, attended the rally and spoke in favor of reform.

There was no counterprotest Thursday evening, or even a single person vocally opposed, so the pro-reform voices carried the day.

Many argued that health care reform must include a public option and that employers must be forced to pay for some employee health care costs. They also urged Indiana’s representatives in Washington to provide leadership on the issue.

“When I get out of college, I’m not going to be able to afford health care,” said Brianna Dines, an IU student who said the United States should be learning lessons from Canada. “We are not always right. We should be open to learning from other systems that work.”



Wendell St. John listens to speakers at a rally Thursday supporting health care reform proposals. David Snodgrass | Herald-Times

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Jackie Yenna, left, president of the Central Labor Council, sends a message to Sen. Evan Bayh supporting proposed health care reform measures as Milton Fisk messages another official. A rally supporting reform measures centers on a travelling bus urging support. David Snodgrass | Herald-Times

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