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Sebelius stumps for Obamacare in return visit to NJ

Like a candidate who goes to where the votes are, U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius returned to northern New Jersey this morning to get the administration's message out to the uninsured.

She delivered her stump speech a week before the deadline for Americans without health insurance to buy policies through the federal website, healthcare.gov.

The enrollment deadline is midnight, March 31.

"We don't intend to move that date," Sebelius said at a press conference at Montclair State University.

With a message aimed at college students, she said a 27-year-old North Jersey resident earning \$25,000 a year could buy a policy for \$114 a month after. "My guess is they can't get a cell phone plan for \$114 a month, or a cable plan," she said.

The Obama administration has focused its last-minute efforts on regions of the country with a large potential crop of enrollees. While New Jersey doesn't have an unusual proportion of uninsured, the state's population density makes it fertile ground for getting out its message.

Some 40 percent of New Jersey's uninsured - or roughly 417,000 - live in Bergen Passaic, Essex and Hudson counties, said Sen. Nia Gill, who appeared with Sebelius to push the law's benefits.

The appearance by Sebelius drew quick criticism from Republicans, who noted the press conference was closed to the general public.

"It comes as no surprise Secretary Sebelius kept the public at bay at today's event given that ObamaCare has resulted in more than twice as many insurance cancellation notices in New Jersey than it has provided coverage to the uninsured," said Republican National Committee spokesman Michael Short.

"No wonder a majority of New Jerseyans want to see this law scrapped. Instead of spending taxpayer dollars on scripted, closed-door PR junkets, Secretary Sebelius should be answering for why the Obama Administration mislead New Jerseyans about being able to keep their health care."

The event was held at Montclair State because the university is hosting a temporary enrollment center that will be open every day until the deadline. Based in the Student Center and open to the

public, its hours will be 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. Tues., Thurs., Fri., Sat., and next Monday; 3 p.m. - 9 p.m. Wed., and 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. Sunday.

Visitors are advised to bring along their Social Security number, income tax returns or pay stubs as proof of income, proof of citizenship or legal residence, and an existing email address.

MSU President Susan Cole said enrollment was important to the university because students who are uninsured and encounter health problems become a concern. Their uninsured families also an indirect impact, she said. "If the families of our students have health care problems, then our students have difficulty," she said.

Much of the press conference was devoted to convincing younger adults it was worth their while to enroll - emphasizing unexpected injuries instead of illnesses as a motive to get insured.

"I used to be a 'young invincible' myself," said Gill, mentioning the term policy-makers use for young adults who think they'll never be sick. "And I can tell you the last thing on their mind is what will happen if they get sick."

But "if you're out playing like LeBron or serving like Serena and you get injured," she said, being without coverage could result in big doctor or hospital bills.

So far about 74,000 New Jerseyans have signed up for private health insurance policies offered on the federal marketplace. Roughly 80 percent of them received some federal subsidy to offset the cost. Another 106,000 have become eligible for coverage under the state's expanded Medicaid.

Medicaid enrollment is year-round, so the March 31 deadline doesn't apply.

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