

# Obama peddles private health care to young people in web interview

Andre Damon  
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President Barack Obama appeared in an episode of the comedy interview web series *Between Two Ferns with Zach Galifianakis* Tuesday in an effort to peddle to young people his pro-corporate health insurance exchanges, otherwise known as Obamacare.

*Between Two Ferns*, hosted by comedy web site Funny or Die, involves actor/comedian Galifianakis interviewing celebrities in a consciously awkward fashion, mixed with his trademark tasteless gags. One recent episode involved the host spanking 19-year-old Canadian pop star Justin Bieber; another had Galifianakis open-mouth kissing fellow actor Will Ferrell. Ferrell founded Funny or Die and campaigned for Obama in the last election.

The show's production team was invited to the White House two weeks ago to film the interview in an effort to bolster enrollment among young people. Many young people have avoided signing up for the program, which requires individuals to purchase sub-standard care at inflated prices from private insurers, with minimal, if any, government subsidies.

"Most young Americans right now, they're not covered, and they can get coverage for what it costs to pay your cell phone bill," Obama told Galifianakis.

The appearance was punctuated with flat, awkward, and scripted jokes that trivialized the unconstitutional and illegal activities of the administration. The White House's drone assassination program was reduced to the status of a laugh line, when Galifianakis interrupted Obama at one point and asked, "Is this what they mean by drones?"

At one point, the multimillionaire Galifianakis absurdly tells Obama that he does not own a phone because "I don't want you guys looking at my texts, if you know what I mean," referencing the White House's illegal domestic wiretapping of nearly all communications that was exposed by Edward Snowden. Obama assured him that he wasn't.

The interview was the latest in a series of scripted

events solicited by the White House involving Hollywood celebrities close to the administration. Last July, the White House invited singers and actors to a special meeting to discuss how they could help sell Obamacare. Funny or Die was among those represented at the meeting.

The show debuted the same day that the White House announced another monthly drop in new registrations under the Affordable Care Act. The White House said that only 943,000 people signed up for coverage in February, down from 1.1 million in January and 1.8 million in December.

That left the total enrollment at 4.2 million, far lower than the target of 6 million set for March 31, the deadline for the program's six-month open enrollment. Of those who signed up, one in five failed to pay premiums. Some who made an initial payment failed to pay the next installment, putting them at risk for cancellation, according to the *New York Times*.

A much lower percentage of the program's enrollees are under 35 than the White House had expected. Those aged 18-34 are only 25 percent of registrants, significantly short of the White House's goal of 38 percent.

In this context, Obama's interview was a marketing and publicity stunt. The interview has been watched over 11 million times so far and has boosted traffic to the healthcare.gov site by 40 percent, the White House said.

Participation by young people in the program is vital to its viability, as insuring young people (who have lower health care costs) is more profitable for the private health insurance companies that provide coverage under the Affordable Care Act.

Any uninsured person who does not sign up for the health care exchanges, or lapses in their coverage, will be forced to pay a fine of \$95, or 1 percent of their income, whichever is higher. The penalty increases to 2 percent of income in 2015 and 2.5 percent of income in 2016.

Testifying before the House Ways and Means Committee Wednesday, Kathleen Sebelius, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, said categorically that the White House would not delay the so-called individual mandate, which fines those who do not enroll, despite the fact that the program is running far short of its enrollment target. She also stated categorically that the White House would not extend the so-called open enrollment period beyond March 31.

The least expensive “bronze” plans carry deductibles as high as \$6,350 for an individual and \$12,700 for families, which must be paid in full before most coverage kicks in. A large percentage of bronze plans require full payment of the deductible before they cover many doctor visits, including for the flu, childhood illnesses or treatment for injuries.

Co-payments for doctor visits average \$41 for bronze plans, compared to \$28 in the current individual market. Many bronze plans require cost sharing of as much as 40 percent of the price of some prescription medications. Many expensive drugs are not covered at all because they are not included in plans’ drug formularies.

Overall, Obama’s poll numbers continue to fall, in part due to Obamacare. In March, 41 percent of the population said they approved of Obama, down from 43 percent in January, and the lowest on record.

Ultimately, the overwhelming popular skepticism in the population of the Affordable Care Act is a reflection of its social content: a reactionary scheme to swell the profits of insurance companies while providing the grounds for private companies to slash their existing health care plans.

As with everything else, Obama functions as little more than a frontman for corporate interests, doing his shtick, in an ever-more-desperate fashion, to persuade a skeptical population to accept policies which are fundamentally contrary to their interests.



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