

# Demonstrators support, protest health care reform during Obama visit

PHOENIX - President Barack Obama addressed the Veterans of Foreign Wars Aug. 17 at the Phoenix Convention Center, but perhaps the bigger story was his reception outside.

Hundreds of supporters and protesters assembled on the corners outside the convention center, hoisting signs with messages ranging from "AZ stands with Obama" to "My doctor is my choice."

"We have a moral obligation to make health care available to everyone who needs it and wants it," said Daniel Martinez, a parishioner at St. Mary Magdalene Church in Gilbert. "Ordinary people that are out there are hurting. We need to change what we have now and make it better."

Faith Risolo, a parishioner at Resurrection Church in Tempe, joined Martinez and other Catholics who backed the president's position on health care reform.

"This is a basic social justice piece. This is about the quality of life," she told The Catholic Sun, newspaper of the Phoenix Diocese. "We hear people talking all the time about caring for the unborn, but we need to care about the people who are here regardless of their age, their color, their economic situation. This is social justice. This is who we are as Americans."

While hundreds gathered to support Obama, almost as many gathered to oppose him.

"We're in so much debt now that my children's children won't be able to pay that debt off," said Pat Todd, a Phoenix resident. "If we add health care to it, that's almost the last nail in the coffin financially for our country."

Many of the protesters said they opposed the health care reform plan Congress is

considering, because they are against the federal government having a bigger role in health care.

“What the people really need, more than anything else, is less government intervention, especially in health care,” Harry Mathews said. “Health reform yes, but not a total takeover of the health care business.”

Saul Solis, a parishioner at St. Timothy Church in Mesa, came to support the president and health care reform, but expressed reservations about abortion funding.

“We have to make sure it does not pay for abortions and we have to change any clauses that it may have with respect to that,” he said. “But that doesn’t mean we don’t need reform.”

Inside, the president addressed health care concerns with the veterans.

“One thing that reform won’t change is veterans’ health care,” he said. “No one is going to take away your benefits. That’s the truth.”

Ralph Nee of Massachusetts, a veteran in town for the convention, was impressed with the president’s remarks.

“He picked up the VA budget before the VFW or anybody even talked to him,” he told The Catholic Sun. Increasing the budget, Nee said, would be a “big move” to support veterans in the United States.

Other veterans were less supportive.

“When everyone is standing there applauding, I’m standing there with my hands in my pockets. Does that tell you something?” said Alvin Weaver, a World War II veteran and a parishioner at Immaculate Conception Church in San Diego.

“I hope he does something. We need someone to do something,” he said. “He has the possibility of doing it, but I don’t think he has the probability. That’s my problem.”