



Bush visits campus



▲ President George W. Bush rejoiced with panelist Joyce Phifer as she gave thanks to the “Good Lord,” as well as the doctors and nurses at a local community health clinic who helped treat her heart condition. Phifer was one of two patients on the panel who discussed the benefits of community health centers.

Community health clinics dominated the agenda during the 40 minute long panel discussion

By Elizabeth Tabak
THE JAMBAR

President George W. Bush Tuesday told an invitation-only crowd of about 150 that community health clinics are at the heart of improving the American health system — a message that dominated his 40-minute

address at Youngstown State University.

Bush, who offered no remarks about the economy and only brief references to the war in Iraq, discussed healthcare reform before local medical professionals, community leaders and a handful of university representatives.

Joining Bush in what he called a “dialogue” on the Bliss Hall Spotlight Theater stage were three health care experts and two patients, all offering endorsements of community health clinics.

Bush sat in a wooden chair surrounded by doctors, nurses and other members of the

health community in front of a large banner that read “strengthening healthcare.”

Local political analysts said Bush, a Republican, was motivated to come to the historically Democratic Mahoning Valley in an effort to peel off some support.

YSU officials had about a week to prepare and Secret Service agents and other police helped secure the campus.

As Bush spoke, protestors clustered along Wick Avenue across from Bliss Hall, some holding signs, including several supporting Democratic Party Presidential candidate John Kerry.

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Bush's low-profile visit to YSU's campus came one day after he outlined his five-point plan for turning sovereignty over to the Iraqi people.

University President David Sweet did not attend Bush's address. Vice President for Administration John L. Habat said Sweet was on vacation. Several university trustees did attend.

During discussion with panelists, Bush changed his posture and expressions — sometimes chuckling at jokes and other times frowning at stories of hard times people shared.

One woman sitting next to Bush told him how she had four blockages in her heart that could have gone unnoticed but for the persistence of workers at the Youngstown Community Health Center on Wick Avenue.

The woman, Joyce Phifer, told Bush how God had also helped. "Had it not been for the good Lord and these doctors and nurses, I probably would not be sitting here," Phifer said as she waved her hand towards the sky.

As Phifer said "Hallelujah" and "praise God," Bush added, "That's right." The president then raised his hand and mirrored Phifer's religious wave.

Bush, with a microphone in his hand, glanced at notes in front of him as he guided the program into its three phases — discussion of his national healthcare vision, explanations of local community health centers and testimonials to their success.

Bush outlined the positive actions he said he has taken toward reforming healthcare, including creating senior discount cards for prescription medicine and health savings accounts.

Another positive development in healthcare, Bush said, is the expansion and construction of about 600 healthcare centers in the United States.

Illustrating his point about the healthcare centers, Bush spoke to Phifer and Cynthia Sacco, both patients at local community healthcare centers.

Sacco, a former cancer patient, discussed the personal care and attention she said she received from physicians in the community health center.

"The centers don't only take care of a patient's physical needs, they take care of their emotional needs as well," Sacco said.

Bush said his hope is to make patient care more personalized and affordable.

"We need to make sure that the patient-doctor relationship is the center of the healthcare decision making process, not Washington D.C.," Bush said.

"Community health centers are the safety net that make sure our citizens are getting the care they need," Bush said.

While Bush spoke, Secret Service agents and Youngstown Police officers kept watch over protestors who said they believed that Bush's focus on healthcare is not the most pressing need for the Mahoning Valley. The protestors were not permitted to cross Wick Avenue.

Bill Border, who stood outside of Kilcawley Center Tuesday afternoon, said he was not surprised that admission into the Bush event was by invitation only.

"He isn't going to have people there that don't like him. He's on the campaign trail," Border said.

Bush referred to the military and wealth as the strengths of the United States. He also praised the abilities of American doctors, nurses and volunteers.

"The true strengths of our country are the hearts and souls of our citizens," Bush said.