

# One-Year Later: Young Americans Rate Progress on National Priorities

Tuesday, November 3, 2009\*

## Checking in on:\*\*

Health Care Reform  
Climate Change and Energy  
Jobs and the Economy  
Higher Education  
Gay Rights  
Veterans  
Immigration

## With “Tweets” and bold statements and more\*\*\* from:

Rock the Vote  
Campus Progress  
80 Million Strong for Young American Jobs  
Energy Action Coalition  
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America  
National Youth Advocacy Coalition  
United States Student Association  
Y.I. Want Change: Young America’s Campaign for Real Health Care Reform

\*OK, today is technically 364 days later.

\*\*Not a comprehensive list of youth priorities, but some big ones.

\*\*\*With special appearances by text boxes highlighting representative youth actions. Again, not comprehensive, but impressive.

## **INTRODUCTION**

On November 4, 2008, young Americans turned out to the polls in record numbers for candidates that promised to deliver on an overwhelmingly progressive mandate. With their votes, over 22 million 18-29 year olds propelled Barack Obama to the presidency and made headlines with an unprecedented demand for change on issues like health care, education, climate change, and gay rights. Young Americans made the commitment to be an active participant in reforming the nation by staying involved and holding their elected officials accountable.

An assessment of the legislative landscape is indeed murky: progress on some issues has been slow but steady; on others, non-existent. However, any assessment of young people is quite clear: a constant nationwide stream of post-election, youth-led activities ranging from rallies and canvassing, to grassroots lobbying, phone calls, letter writing, and Facebook forums, is proof of young people's unrelenting civic and political engagement.

Now, a year later, America continues to face ongoing challenges including a failing economy, an ever-growing energy crisis, and critical legislation stalled by partisan bickering. Below, national youth organizations give their takes on the issues that young people care about, progress in Washington, and what young people have done to achieve the change they voted for and continue to demand.

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## **HEALTH CARE REFORM**

Must pass #hcr w/ #publicoption, subsidies, no discrim, no insurance in name only #ywic #1yrlater

### **Statement from the Y.I. Want Change Coalition:**

“The health care crisis is young America's crisis and our generation has been fighting to make sure that health insurance is affordable, competitive, continuous, comprehensive and fair. Young people are the most uninsured age group in America and have been vocal about the need to change the system.

We are encouraged that Congress is further than it has ever been on comprehensive health care reform. The House of Representatives has responded with a bill that includes critical reforms for young people: the creation of the Health Insurance Exchange marketplace with a public option; subsidies to make insurance more affordable; efforts to contain costs through caps on deductibles, out-of-pocket expenses and co-pays; reform of the insurance industry by ending discriminatory and abusive practices, especially pre-existing conditions and gender discrimination; better employer-based coverage; and the focus on preventive care. We are particularly grateful for the inclusion of a key provision to

allow young adults to remain on their parents' insurance policy until the age of 27.

These elements – and subsidies that provide access to quality, affordable health care for all Americans – are essential to comprehensive reform. The Senate must finalize a bill that is a good deal for young people. As Congress and the White House continue to craft final health care reform legislation, they must focus on affordability, eliminate worthless high-deductible catastrophic plans that are insurance in name only, and include funding for education so that young Americans are “informed consumers” in this new marketplace.”

### **Active in health care reform? Let us count seven ways:**

1. Launching national day of action tomorrow on campuses and in communities around the country to write to their representatives in Washington, host call-in days, and gather stories.
2. Met with key elected official and their staffs – including a coordinated day of action on October 13<sup>th</sup> with young Americans from 30 states – to push youth coalition policy agenda.
3. Lead the effort to encourage the House leadership to add a provision allowing young people to stay on their parents' health insurance until age 27 to final House bill.
4. Ran national television advertising campaign targeting young people on MTV, BET, and Comedy Central that featured Zach Braff from Scrubs.
5. Mobilized thousands of young people to rallies and town halls, generated thousands of letters, emails and phone calls, and knocked on thousands of doors in key states
6. Provided youth-specific health care information on dedicated websites, Facebook pages, and online forums with Howard Dean and Kathleen Sebelius.
7. Generated earned media, op-eds, and letters to the editor in support of reform in national and local outlets.

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## **CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY**

Meaningful climate legislation is still possible in '09 & we can lead in Copenhagen #gametimeobama #1yrlater

### **Statement from Energy Action Coalition:**

“In March, 12,000 young people descended upon Washington for Power Shift 2009, filling Congressional offices to demand the passage of a strong climate bill. One year from the election, and we still do not have a climate bill to celebrate. That doesn't mean that Washington hasn't responded: from fuel efficiency standards to a stimulus packed full of

resources to spur the green economy to the President's recent commitment to make federal buildings beacons of efficiency, there is action in the right direction.

The Energy Action Coalition, a partnership of more than 50 organizations united in the fight for a clean energy future, has worked hard all year to hold ourselves, President Obama, Congress, and local officials to the pledges we've all made to reduce harmful pollution and eliminate dirty energy sources. We were thrilled that President Obama made a speech on energy at MIT just over a week ago, in which he reasserted the United States' commitment to leading the world on climate and energy innovation. We see tremendous opportunity to achieve our goals this year. The House of Representatives has passed a comprehensive climate change and energy bill. The U.S. Senate is holding hearings this month that could lead to aggressive, immediate legislation. And the United Nations will host climate negotiations in Copenhagen in December that young people are hoping will lead to an ambitious and binding global deal."

### **Online campaign to generate off-line action**

Today, EAC is launching a website called [www.itsgametimeobama.org](http://www.itsgametimeobama.org), where young activists can sign a petition to ask the President to meet with youth climate leaders, to make a national address outlining his specific policy priorities, and to attend the Copenhagen summit in person in December. If this were one of the pick-up basketball games President Obama loves so much, we might say that it's the fourth quarter and it's time for him to make a big play.

We know President Obama is a winner. As his teammates, we're ready to prove that our commitment to change is renewable.

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## **JOBS AND THE ECONOMY**

Youth unemployment nearly 2x nat'l avg, stimulus was start but need jobs bill for young #1yrlater

### **Statement from 80 Million Strong Coalition:**

"The current economic crisis is hurting America's youth more than any other generation. Our national unemployment is 17.3% - nearly double the national average - and at over 21% for young Latinos and 27% for young African-Americans. We graduate college with an average of \$27,000 in student loans and have an average credit card debt of \$2000 by the age of 24. We are uninsured and victims of predatory lending. Despite the overwhelming evidence, Congress has yet to act or even discuss the impact of the economic crisis on young Americans.

To address this crisis head-on, nearly thirty of the nation's leading youth

organizations launched the *80 Million Strong for Young American Jobs Coalition*, working collaboratively to endorse various policy platforms that will create jobs and economic opportunity for the 80 million members of the Millennial generation. The coalition's proposals center on four areas: increasing entrepreneurship resources, student debt reform, access to public service careers, and the creation of 'mission critical' jobs that tap young talents in the areas of health care, national security, and green jobs.

Major job creation legislation has not been tackled since the stimulus bill was passed by Congress and signed by the President. In order to strengthen the American economy, we must invest in young adults today. Our parents and grandparents have been hit hard by this crisis; their security and retirement is on the line. The Millennial generation is already stepping up by going home and working hard to support their families. We cannot leave the younger generations crippled with debt and waiting for jobs; we need to help them stand up and lead the new economy, lifting the burden off all generations in the process."

### **Heard on the Hill . . . and Beyond**

80 Million Strong, a coalition of some of the largest youth organizations in the nation, convened a summit in July where young people from all walks of life and from over 30 states presented solutions to the current economic crisis. With members of Congress, legislative staff, and White House officials in attendance, the summit participants presented ideas ranging from a plan to provide additional training programs to help fill America's massive nursing shortages to a fellowship program that would ensure socio-economic diversity among unpaid Capitol Hill interns.

Last month, a representative of the 80 Million Strong Coalition testified before the House Committee on Education and Labor, providing them with information about the effect the struggling economy has had on young people, and offering clear solutions to address these significant issues.

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## **HIGHER EDUCATION**

Obama/House put students over banks w/ #SAFRA, Senate must pass #SAFRA & Congress must pass #DREAM Act #1yrlater

## Statement from United States Student Association:

“Since the beginning days of the Obama Administration, statements expressing the renewed commitment to education have echoed through the White House and the Capitol. The Obama Administration and lawmakers are making the largest investment in higher education in American history and students are leading the fight to ensure that the Federal government works for students and working families.

Congress has already taken bold steps toward reaching President Obama's goal of leading the world in college graduation rates by prioritizing education in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. In September, the House of Representatives furthered its commitment to students by passing legislation to reform the federal student aid system through the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act (H.R. 3221), which makes a landmark investment in the Pell grant, the Perkins Loans program, and work study programs that support students burdened by rising tuition. Young people have also called on Congress to pass the Develop, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act to make education a right for all, regardless of immigration status.”

### **Taking Action in Congress for Student Aid**

Students lead by Campus Progress, the Student PIRGS, the United States Students Association and Rock the Vote have been at the forefront of recent action in Congress, making office visits and generating calls and emails about student aid reform. In September, college students took part in a press conference with Congressman George Miller, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, and Speaker Pelosi to bolster the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act (SAFRA), which passed the House later that week.

Later in September, student organizations in 26 states participated in the DREAM Act back-to-school day of action, drawing attention to the need to pass the Federal DREAM Act. In October, students across the country participated in a “Raising Pell” week of action, making thousands of phone calls and sending thousands of faxes and Tweets to their Senators, urging them to support SAFRA.

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## **GAY RIGHTS**

Historic #LGBT legislation & policies=good start, but #ENDA, #DADT, lots more 4 Pres/Cong #1yrlater

## Statement from National Youth Advocacy Coalition:

“The LGBT community has seen more action in Washington in the last year than over the previous eight years combined. The President recently signed hate crimes legislation the LGBT community had been seeking for over ten years - the first major piece

of pro-LGBT legislation to ever pass the Congress and be signed into law.

President Obama's administration has hired and appointed a record number of LGBT US Americans; improved access to same-sex partners of federal employees - including those serving abroad; eliminated a Census Bureau policy that prevented same-sex marriages from being counted; made important strides towards eliminating barriers to LGBT individuals seeking federal housing or senior citizen support; and lifted a travel ban on HIV positive individuals seeking refuge in the U.S.

However, a number of promises by Congress and the President remain unfulfilled. Passage of an inclusive Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) will put an end to legally being able to fire gays and lesbians in 30 states and transgender people in 38 states. Congress must also repeal the failed "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy and the misnamed Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). And the President, Congress and courts must do more to make the federal government an ally to homeless, bullied and underserved LGBTQ youth."

### **Leading the charge in the fight for equal rights**

After the 2008 elections, young people organized protests across the country which drew massive crowds in response to the passage of Proposition 8, which banned same-sex marriage in California. Young people were the dominant force in planning and attending the National March for Equality, which brought over 200,000 LGBT advocates to Washington, D.C. and dramatically increased the visibility of the LGBT civil rights movement within the Web 2.0 community.

LGBT youth and advocacy organizations have presented a list of important policy changes to the White House and have been holding ongoing meetings to advance these priorities.

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## **VETERANS**

DC delivers VA reform, mental health, stop loss; need more on homeless, jobs, female health #1yrlater

### **Statement from Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America:**

"The Administration and Congress have delivered on some key priorities for young veterans. They instituted advanced appropriations for VA Healthcare, which will provide timely, predictable funding for veterans' health care by requiring Congress to approve a health care budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) at least one year in advance;

increased funding for the VA; provided mandatory mental health screenings for every returning service member; and phased out of the Stop Loss policy and guaranteed retroactive payments for all troops stop-losses since 9/11.

The young veterans community is pushing for more action to address homelessness for new veterans. The President has committed to ending veteran homelessness, but new prevention programs and increased funding for existing programs have stalled in Congress leaving over 100,000 veterans sleeping on our streets on any given night. The VA must also make good on its commitment to provide comprehensive primary health care to female veterans. Further, we need unemployment programs to train employers and veterans to the value veterans can bring to the workforce. And foreclosure rates in military towns are increasing at four times the national average. The VA should conduct a massive education and outreach campaign to inform veterans of the VA's low-risk and underutilized Home Loan program.

This Administration needs to stop paying lip service to these issues and enact some meaningful reforms. The VA's budget is 30 days late and every day the VA's budget is late, veterans health care must be rationed, new programs stalled and valuable resources wasted."

### **Young Veterans' Successful Pushes for Legislative Action**

From advanced funding for the VA to back pay for stop-losses troops, young veterans have been engaged in the legislative process. The annual "Storm the Hill" trip connected veterans with their representatives, and members of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America generated calls to Senators urging the inclusion of a bill to provide almost \$5,000 in retroactive payments to troops who have been stop-losses since September 11<sup>th</sup>. Additionally, almost 20,000 veterans and their supporters have signed a pledge to raise awareness about issues facing new veterans.

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## **IMMIGRATION**

Immigration reform undone, need pathway to citizenship & DREAM Act, civil rights struggle of our time #1yrlater

### **Statement from Campus Progress:**

"In a country that refuses to acknowledge the 12 million undocumented immigrants living within its borders, young people have been compelled to join what is now the civil

rights struggle of the Millennial generation, and our time. Most children who have undocumented parents are now citizens by birth and have grown up in the United States. Their numbers have grown from 2.7 million in 2003 to 4 million in 2008, according to recent data from the nonprofit Pew Hispanic Center. Still, millions more are undocumented, and must pursue their dreams without papers.

While immigration reform failed to recognize their families under the George W. Bush administration, with the election of President Barack Obama, there is another chance to provide a pathway to citizenship for the millions who have lived and worked in the country for decades, without the benefits of legal rights extended to citizens. Federal legislation like the DREAM Act and comprehensive immigration reform would stop punishing young people for an immigration status they had no control over and would keep families together.

While the White House and other lawmakers have acknowledged that immigration reform will be a top priority in the next few years, whether the legislation actually becomes law will be up to the mobilization of youths and families who have become, and are becoming, students of community organizing. Thus, this upcoming civil rights battle has the potential to change the political landscape for generations to come.”

### **The human face of the immigration fight and organizing for change**

Since the 2008 election, three undocumented youths—Walter Lara, 23, Taha Mowla, 18, and Herta Llusho, 19—who were brought into the United States when they were young children, have brought much-needed attention to the broken immigration system by successfully organizing to halt pending deportation orders. With the help of the social networking site Dreamactivist.org and the Service Employees International Union, the orders against the three honors students were eventually deferred by the Department of Homeland Security.

Center for Community Change and the Reform Immigration For America Campaign have been teaching young people the art of community organizing this last year, mentoring them on ways to mobilize actions on a local level through phone calls and canvassing.