

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH FORMER MARYLAND GOV. MARTIN O'MALLEY

Chuck Douglas: How do your experiences as Mayor of Baltimore and Governor of Maryland help prepare you to be president?

O'Malley: The most important job of the President of the United States is to protect the people of the United States and every day of my 15 years of executive service, I've woken every morning with that understanding as a mayor of a big and very challenged city. As governor, I went to sleep every night knowing that was my first responsibility.

I am the only candidate in this race with 15 years of executive experience, not only holding progressive goals and values for myself and the people I served, but being able to bring people together to achieve those goals. The executive discipline is very different from being a legislator, because it requires an understanding of how to get people to communicate, collaborate and cooperate, in order to solve problems and achieve better results.

Chuck: You want better college education tuition funding and I understand you had a recent announcement on that. Can you tell the folks a little bit about that program?

O'Malley: I believe that one of the key pieces of our success as a nation has been our willingness generation after generation to educate our children at higher and better levels. That's what has made the American dream real in our country. We have now veered far away from the course of beliefs and actions that we had as a people. My dad, for example, came home from WWII and went to college only because of the GI Bill. Now we are saddling our kids with a mountain of debt the likeness of which no industrial nation on the planet does. That is a choice. Progress is a choice. So too



is whether or not we make college affordable for all or whether we make it so expensive that it's only available to the few. I'm the only candidate in this race who's actually been successful as an executive in holding down the cost of tuition. We went four years in a row in Maryland without a penny's increase in college tuition and only one other state, Montana, did a better job than we did over an eight year period of holding down the costs of college education.

I know as an executive that the difference between a dream and a goal is a deadline. The first goal is within five years time we make debt free college an option that is available to every family. The second goal is to improve degree completion by 25%. Right now we have a lot of families suffering with the worst of both worlds of a mountain of debt, and yet, they don't have the ability to continue to borrow for a child to complete their degree. I believe there are a number of leading actions that we have to take in order to reach both of those goals. Congress sets the rates for student loans so Congress should reduce the rates and make it easier for people who've been caught in the switches to go back and re-negotiate. It's outrageous that you can buy a home for a lesser interest payment than you can send a kid to college, and the money goes to our Federal Government.

I also believe that every student should go into an in-

come based re-payment plan. That is to say that they don't pay more than 10% of their salary to service their loan with a loan forgiveness at the end of that 20 - 30 years period, whatever it might be. Also, by doing things like redesigning the fourth year of high school so that all kids can earn a year of college credits before high school graduation and the courses are recognized in the articulation agreements when they go on to community college or a four year program. The Federal Government needs to step up on its Pell Grants because those have been greatly reduced and not kept pace with demand or inflation. But all of this, at the end of the day, has to be a collaborative approach.



Chuck: The Los Angeles Times reported recently that heroin use has increased 63% in America since 2004, and I know you had to deal with that as Mayor of Baltimore, as well as Governor. Are there things we can we do nationally to help reduce this kind of growth in heroin addiction?

O'Malley: There are always things we can do. One of the most debilitating diseases that affect public policy is the belief that there is nothing we can do about it. It nearly killed my home city of Baltimore, the belief that we can't do anything about crime or addiction. We achieved the biggest reductions in crime

after my election in any major city in America, and we did a lot more on drug treatment and continued to do more when I was elected Governor with a lot of neighbors who suffered from addictions in our State. We greatly expanded drug treatment, but this is a complex problem. Out of my 15 years of executive service, for 13 of them we really felt we had this figured out namely by expansion of treatment that brought down overdose deaths and saved lives. The arrival of powerful pain pills and the broader prescribing of these pain pills has changed things though.

Unfortunately, what we saw for the last two years of my time as Governor was the hockey stick sort of spike in heroin overdose deaths in our State and great numbers of them were turning from their pain pills to heroin, which was cheaper and more widely available. Now we are figuring out that the place for intervention begins at the emergency rooms, when a person first comes in with a near death episode. And talking to a gentleman involved in this in Providence, Rhode Island, they have learned that by having recovered addicts work with emergency rooms they can intervene in a much more effective way than somebody who has never suffered from addiction. We also need better information sharing and the FDA, on a national level, needs to reign in the over prescribing of addictive pain pills.

Chuck: Should tax rates on one million dollars of earned or unearned income be increased? In other words, no loop holes. It's one million whether it's from income or capital gains or dividends.

O'Malley: Yes, probably. That's what we did in my State. Actually, we had a very flat income tax in our State. (cont. on p. 6)

(cont. from p. 3) As Governor, I made that income tax more progressive, so we asked the highest earning 15% of us to pay a little more and we increased the earned income tax credit twice in order to lower rates for people at the lowest level. We had a better rate of job creation than our neighbors in Pennsylvania and Virginia who were trying to cut their way to prosperity.

We instead made the investments, made our public schools the best in America for five years in a row and went four years in a row without a penny's increase in college tuition. We also made investments in infrastructure, waste water processing, broadband and transportation in order to put our people back to work. And we found that our balanced approach, even though it called upon some of us to pay more than we used to, was best for our common good as a State.

Chuck: As a Democrat are there any changes at all to Obamacare that you think you would want to consider if you are elected President?

O'Malley: Let me say this, whether it's Social Security, Medicaid or Medicare, no human program was ever

introduced perfectly. It was never without the need for improvement and adjustment as times changed and experience gave us lessons to learn from. And the same is true for the Affordable Care Act. The way that the law punishes union health plans was an unanticipated consequence and it would be good to find a way to re-visit that. There were some requirements setting thresholds on how many employees you could have before certain aspects of the law kicked in and that probably needs to be re-visited as well.

But, I think the bigger opportunity is improving wellness and outcomes while reducing costs. In our state that is what we were able to do. We were able to get a Medicare waiver and we've moved all 46 of our acute care hospitals out of fee for service payments. Last year alone, our hospitals saved \$100M in unnecessary costs from avoidable hospital readmissions. They have now become more profitable by the greater numbers of citizens that they keep out of hospital beds.

Chuck: Governor, thank you for sharing your views with us.