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Contributing Writer

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The Cuyahoga County Young Democrats (CCYD) and their newly elected 2011 officials hosted a “Watch Party” of the President’s speech to recruit more members into the organization and gain momentum for their agenda. CCYD officers in attendance were President Paul Sadler, First Vice President Christopher Fuentes, Second Vice President Steve Cargile, Treasurer Brittney Coleman and Secretary Meran Chang.

Prior to the CCYD election, there were only 60 active members in the organization. In just two weeks, the group has signed up more than 200 people. By the 2012 election they hope to reach 5,000 members, said Fuentes of their efforts.

According to the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections, just 44 percent of the county’s registered voting population casted ballots in the November 2010 midterm election.

“Since Obama’s election, people have gotten less excited,” Fuentes said. “Our goal is to reinvigorate the county.”

The new CCYD committee plans on bettering communication amongst each other, meeting once a month to discuss future plans on how to inform the public about Obama’s policies.

Fuentes and Sadler discussed strategies to bring back the morale of 2008, which include lots of fundraisers and networking. They emphasized the importance of social events such as a rally with the Cleveland State University Men’s basketball team, and staying connected with other college campuses. Sadler said upping the member cut off age from 35 to 40 is a possibility, and Fuentes mentioned reaching out to seniors in high school who are on the verge of turning 18.

During his speech Obama said, “Over the next 10 years, nearly half of all new jobs will require education that goes beyond a high school education. And yet, as many as a quarter of our students aren’t even finishing high school.”

Cleveland ranks lower than the national average. A 2008 report by America’s Promise Alliance indicated that the region has the largest urban-suburban gap for graduation rates. Thirty-eight percent of high school freshmen graduate within four years, compared with 80 percent in the suburbs.

Fuentes, a Shaker Heights High School graduate, said he was shocked when he first heard Cleveland public schools were among the worst in the country.

“We need to find a way where we can get the same education that’s happening out in Orange, Hudson and Beachwood back into the city,” he said. “We can’t bring the people out of the city. We need to bring the educators into the city.”

In a week that saw an Akron woman jailed for falsifying her residence in order to enroll her children in a quality school district, the education reform portion of Obama’s speech grabbed the attention of many in the room.

“Cutting the deficit by gutting our investments in innovation and education is like lightening an overloaded airplane by removing its engine,” said Obama. “It may make you feel like you’re flying at first, but it won’t take long before you feel the impact.”