



THE 2008
PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES
ON
HEALTH CARE REFORM

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Prepared by:
Victoria Craig Bunce, Director of Research and Policy, The Council for Affordable Health Insurance
Merrill Matthews, Executive Director, The Council for Affordable Health Insurance

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Council for Affordable Health Insurance
127 S. Peyton Street, Suite 210
Alexandria, VA 22314
Phone: 703/836-6200 Fax: 703/836-6550
Email: mail@cahi.org
www.cahi.org

*For additional information please contact the Council for Affordable Health Insurance at 703/836-6200
or by email at publications@cahi.org.*

Although the 2008 presidential election is more than a year away, many candidates are already positioning themselves on a campaign issue they think will be very important to voters — reforming the U.S. health care system. While it is still early in the campaign process and plan details are incomplete for most candidates, these summaries provide a snapshot of the candidates and their blueprint for reform. Our intent is to be thorough and accurate in compiling what they have said or indicated they want to do. As their plans take shape we intend to explain what their proposals mean for the health care system and for Americans' ability to have access to affordable coverage. But we also plan to eliminate their spin so that the public understands not just what the candidates have said, but what they mean.

(Note: At this point, some of the candidates have provided little specific information. In arranging the order below, we identify those who are generally considered the leading candidates, both by fundraising and popularity, and then arranged them in alphabetical order. We identified the second group as “Second-Tier Candidates” simply as a way to say they are lower in the polls; obviously, one or more of them could gain momentum and move into the first tier. And then there are several candidates about whom there is little or no information from their statements, websites or from news articles. We put them in a third category. We will update the document frequently as existing candidates add to or alter their proposals and as others drop out of the race.)

Current Leading Contenders

Senator John McCain (R)

www.johnmccain.com

John McCain's proposals focus on market-based reforms. According to his presidential campaign website and press statements, he would:

- Develop a health plan that every American can take advantage of and afford without instituting an individual mandate.
- Make patients the center of care through preventive care and require transparency by providers regarding medical outcomes, quality of care and costs.
- Develop national standards for measuring and recording treatments and outcomes.
- Give states flexibility and encouragement in experimenting with health care reform initiatives.
- Allow people to buy insurance across state lines.
- Provide tax incentives for low-income people so they can afford to buy health coverage. All individuals would receive a \$2,500 refundable tax credit (up to \$5,000 for a family) for insurance coverage. Any tax-credit funds remaining after the purchase of health insurance could be deposited into a Health Savings Account. Under such a scenario, the employer tax deduction stays in place, but the employee now loses the tax exclusion for health insurance, which is replaced by a refundable tax credit.
- Expand community health centers and clinics in retail outlets.
- Believes SCHIP and other public health programs should be limited to low-income residents only.
- Foster the development of safe and cheaper generic drugs and biologics, including the importation of drugs from foreign countries to keep prices competitive.
- Put health care online and encourage telemedicine.

- Address public health initiatives such as obesity, diabetes and smoking.
- Allow purchasing pools and association health plans as a means of obtaining portable and affordable health insurance.
- Address medical malpractice reform.
- Make Health Savings Accounts more available.
- Will act to control Medicare growth by enacting comprehensive health care reforms that will reduce the growth in Medicare spending, protect seniors against rising Medicare premium payments, and preserve the advancements in medical science central to providing quality care.
- Work to advance federal research into autism, promote early screening, and identify better treatment options, while providing support for children with autism so that they may reach their full potential.

Senator Barack Obama (D)

www.barackobama.com

Barack Obama plans to establish a new public insurance program, available to Americans who do not have insurance through their employer and also do not qualify for Medicaid or SCHIP. According to his website and press statements he would:

- Create a public program similar to a health plan offered to federal employees (complete with guaranteed renewability, comprehensive benefits, subsidies and portability).
- Create a National Health Insurance Exchange (another word for Connector, similar to the Massachusetts insurance Connector) for consumers to shop among private plans.
- Prohibit insurers from denying applications due to pre-existing conditions (guarantee issue).
- Require employers to share the cost of insuring workers (i.e., an employer mandate).
- Not implement an individual mandate (unlike many other Democratic candidates) that requires everyone to have coverage.
- Strengthen antitrust laws. Promote new models for addressing physician errors that improve patient safety, strengthen the doctor-patient relationship, and reduce the need for malpractice suits.
- Require all children to have health care coverage.
- Expand SCHIP and Medicaid eligibility.
- Allow states to continue implementing health care reform initiatives.
- Reduce the cost of coverage through computerized record-keeping, importation of prescription drugs and greater use of generic drugs, and emphasize prevention of disease rather than cure.
- Hire more staff to process disability claims and establish electronic health records for veterans.
- Pay for his plan's estimated cost of \$50 billion to \$65 billion per year by letting Bush's tax cuts expire on those making more than \$250,000 per year.
- Pledge an open process (unlike the Clinton Care reform).
- Support the expansion of federal funding for embryonic stem cell research.

Additional Reading About the Candidates

Senator John McCain (R)

www.mccain.senate.gov

<http://216.239.51.104/search?q=cache:cvxhbbyWsncl:blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2007/06/10/mccain-to-prescribe-remedy-for-us-health-care-ills/+John+McCain,+health+care,+without+a+mandate&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1&gl=us>

Senator Barack Obama (D)

www.usatoday.com/news/politics/election2008/2007-06-25-health-reform_N.htm

http://www.kaisernetwork.org/daily_reports/health2008dr.cfm?DR_ID=47322