

OUR VIEW

Candidates lack health motives

America's middle and underclasses are in the throes of a health care pandemic, though you wouldn't know it by listening to the rhetoric of the major-party presidential candidates. Nor would you know it by reading the nation's major newspapers, watching TV news shows or logging onto Internet news websites.

This isn't to say that the candidates aren't talking about medical care. They are, and it's all about political expedience. To wit:

President Bush has said he wants to modernize Medicare, ultimately passing legislation to give seniors more health care choices and a prescription drug benefit. He proposes to adopt national standards to make the medical liability system more fair, predictable and timely, and to improve health care quality and patient safety through litigation reform. Bush says he will promote Medical Savings Accounts and push legislation to allow small businesses to band together to provide health care to their employees. He also pledges to work with states to strengthen Medicaid and State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). Finally, he supports passage of a Patients' Bill of Rights, development of electronic health records and making genetic discrimination illegal. He'd finance reform with federal funds (\$400 billion over the next 10 years).

John Kerry would create an employer-sponsored insurance pool to cover catastrophic expenses (the pool would reimburse employer groups for an individual's expenses in excess of \$50,000); seek to slow the rise of prescription drug prices; push to make malpractice insurance more affordable (he's opposed to capping non-economic damages at \$250,000); work to expand SCHIP and Medicaid; allow every American to buy into the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program; and propose a significant increase in funding to health agencies. He would pay for the plan by canceling some of the Bush tax cuts that specifically benefit the wealthy.

Notice that neither candidate directly addresses the access-to-care crisis afflicting the poor and minority communities. According to the Washington, D.C.-based National Association of Community Health Centers, Inc., 36 million Americans lack access to basic health care, with low-income families and minorities hit the hardest. "One in eight Americans—that's 12 percent of the population—are who we call 'medically unserved'—with no access to health care," Dan Hawkins, vice president for policy at NACHC said in a statement. "They live in inner-cities and in isolated rural communities. But no matter where they live, the story is the same: they can't get health care because there aren't enough doctors in their communities who are willing or able to care for them."

The NACHC notes that "almost half of the people who are 'medically unserved' are from low-income families, and nearly two in five are members of minority groups. At 28 percent, Latinos have the highest concentration of medically unserved people." In Fiscal Year 2002 and 2003, more than 20 percent of Nevadans (443,131) were listed as medically unserved, according to "A Nation At Risk," the NACHC's report.

With these sobering statistics about the state of medical care, you'd think the candidates would articulate plans to overcome the crisis. But there's largely silence, each choosing the more politically expedient route—eagerly courting the senior vote by promising the most innovative of Medicaid reforms. This despite countless studies showing that even when minorities have good insurance, they experience worse healthcare than Whites. Despite the fact that the life span disparity between Black and White males (the latter lives seven years longer, on average) hasn't changed in 50 years. There's a disproportionate rate of breast cancer among Black women. The disparities go on and on. While the candidates go on and on about who'll be tougher with Iraq and who's best for the economy, voters should press them on how they plan to resolve the medical crisis affecting the medically underserved and unserved.

POINT OF VIEW



Don't let wedge issues foment divide

By Louie Overstreet
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Last week, I wrote about the wedge issues of abortion, death penalty, gay rights, guns, and immigration being used by the Republicans as a re-election campaign tactic with one-issue voters in certain regions of the country.

This week, I will share with you the positions of Bush and Kerry on the range of issues on which informed voters should cast their ballots.

These 10 issues include the federal budget; education; energy/environment; foreign policy; healthcare; homeland security; Iraq; Social Security; taxes; and trade.

Federal Budget: Bush inherited a budget surplus when he assumed office. The deficit this year is projected to be nearly one-half trillion dollars. Kerry proposes cutting the deficit in half during his term in office by repealing the tax cuts Bush gave to wealthier Americans.

Education: Bush toughened standards for teachers and students and increased federal funding for education by 50 percent. Kerry would provide a tax credit for every year of college on the first \$4,000 paid in tuition. He backed Bush's education plan but believes that too much emphasis is placed on testing.

Energy/Environment: Bush opposes raising mileage requirements and favors logging of federal forests to prevent forest fires. Also favors storing nuclear waste in



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Nevada. Kerry favors a strong federal role in providing uniform environmental protections and opposes storing nuclear waste in Nevada.

Foreign Policy: Bush initiated the policy of pre-emptive strike against nations he believes harbors terrorists. His policy has alienated a number of allies of the United States. Kerry envisions a new era of alliances to replace what he sees as the White House's go it alone approach to foreign policy. He would treat the United Nations as a full partner and pursue collective security arrangements.

Healthcare: Under Bush, the number of Americans without health insurance has gone up each year of his presidency. He proposes new tax-free medical savings account that can be opened by people under 65 years of age. Kerry would expand existing federal system to private citizens through tax credits and subsidies.

(Note for readers: At any given time nearly 48 million Americans do not have health coverage.)

Homeland Security:

Bush created the department and supports the U.S. Patriot Act and would favor expansion of the act when it comes up for renewal. Kerry is supporting all the recommendations contained in the 9/11 Commission's report.

Iraq: Bush is the prime mover behind attacking Iraq under his foreign policy initiative of pre-emptive strikes against other nations. Kerry initially supported the war; however, he now feels the war was started based on faulty intelligence.

As of the first week in September, more than 1,000 Americans have died prosecuting this war and another 7,000 have suffered life-altering injuries. Also, more than \$200 billion have been spent with no end in site.

Social Security: Bush supports giving younger workers the option of putting a portion of their payroll taxes into personal retirement ac-

counts. Kerry opposes any partial privatization of Social Security.

Taxes: Bush is supporting congressional action to make his proposed \$1.3 trillion in tax cuts over the next decade permanent. Kerry is calling for the repeal of tax cuts for persons earning more than \$200,000 a year.

Trade: Bush is an avowed free trader. Kerry is calling for stronger labor and environmental language in bilateral free trade agreements.

It should be noted that this fiscal year the United States is running a trade-deficit of more than one-half trillion dollars.

Folks, how you view these issues and cast your votes is going to determine the future of Nevada and the United States for the next four years. I don't want to hear any crap about my vote doesn't count. These issues are too important this time around to use such a lame excuse.



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