



health08.org
Election news, analysis and events

Transcript provided by Health08.org, a free service of the Kaiser Family Foundation¹
(Tip: Click on the binocular icon to search this document)

**Interview With John McCain
Kaiser Family Foundation
October 31, 2007**

[START RECORDING]

JACKIE JUDD: Senator McCain, thanks for joining us Health08.org.

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: Thank you Jackie.

JACKIE JUDD: You recently announced your health care plan and the three big pieces of it are giving Americans more choice in health insurance, linking payment to quality care, and the notion of personal responsibility. The overarching goal is to control costs.

As you know, some of the other candidates have focused, instead, on the uninsured. So I am wondering if you can walk us through how you made that choice or if it even was considered a choice between costs and the uninsured.

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: Well Jackie, I think that if you want to give the American people straight talk, Medicare is going broke. On the front page of *USA Today* last week, the headline was Medicaid Costs Skyrocket over 10-percent inflation associated with Medicaid in one year. That is not sustainable for any program.

And so I think it is important for us to point out that the highest quality health care in the world is here in the United States of America. The problem is it is not affordable, therefore, not available. So it seems to me that the more you

the uninsured up to 47 million from 30-some million just a couple of years ago is because of the affordability aspect of it, not because of the quality side of it.

So I think you have got to keep costs down. And our, as you mentioned in your, just a second ago, that we have to concentrate on that aspect of it if we are ever going to save the system, which is going broke, a little straight talk.

JACKIE JUDD: Can I ask you a hypothetical and that is if you are elected and if the main points of this program are enacted, what do you think the number of the uninsured looks like after a first term.

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: Well I would hope that it would be very low if we can keep costs down. You are going to be fighting very large bureaucracies. You are going to be fighting very big special interests that like the status quo. You are going to be fighting the pharmaceutical companies who do not want transparency.

I was just out in Iowa and in South Carolina, strangely enough, and both attorney generals of both of those states are suing the pharmaceutical companies because of the charges for pharmaceuticals associated with Medicaid and because there is no transparency.

So we will be taking on a lot of the special interests,

then I think you will see costs level off and then therefore, we will have more and more available insurance.

Finally, by giving each individual a tax credit of \$2,500 or family of \$5,000, then I think we will give them more choices and they will be more responsible as to how they invest that money in order to get affordable and available health insurance.

JACKIE JUDD: What families would qualify for—

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: Every family in America.

JACKIE JUDD: Every single family?

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: Every family in America would get a \$5,000 for refundable tax credit. For the —

JACKIE JUDD: Even if the family has employer-covered insurance?

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: Yes, even if they have it and I think it is important, again, because if they do not use it for health insurance, then they could invest it in health savings accounts.

JACKIE JUDD: You alluded a moment ago to the big challenges facing whoever gets into the White House, and one of the questions you posed in your speech, a few weeks ago, was in our haste, will we promise more than we can deliver and I guess I have to ask you that question. Do you worry about promising

getting Congress and the White House to work together on big changes like this and the special interests you mentioned?

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: I believe that the American people, when told the truth, will always rise to the occasion. How many young Americans today do you think know that there will be no Medicare or Medicaid for them when they reach retirement age if they reach it after the year 2019?

We have got to tell them the truth and we have got to tell them what needs to be done and I think we can do that. And I think the present generation of retirees will feel that same obligation to future generations but they have got to be told the facts.

JACKIE JUDD: And so do you count on the involvement concern of the public to help you break these traditional political logjams?

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: It has to be. It has to be. The Medicare Part D Bill was an \$800 billion to \$1 trillion unfunded liability piled on top of another about \$30 trillion according to David Walker, the head of the Government Accountability Office, unfunded liability associated with Medicare. I wonder how many Americans knew that? The pharmaceutical companies got enormous advantages in that, which think are going to drive costs up.

We should be able to re-import drugs from Canada. We should have the pharmaceutical companies competing against each other to provide these prescription drugs for needy seniors.

Finally, why should we pass a law that pays for my prescription drugs? I vote myself pay raises all the time. Do you not think I could pay for mine? The original intent was that to take care of low-income seniors above the poverty line as you know but not all seniors.

JACKIE JUDD: Was there ever a time in your life, Senator, where you or someone close to you could not afford medical care or medicine that was needed and if so, did that drive you to the point where you are now in terms of laying out this policy?

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: I do not think any one of my family, frankly, most of my family has been in the military including my sons. So and there is health care there but I certainly have known lots of people who either cannot get health insurance because of pre-existing conditions or chronic disease. I have known many people who have basically had their savings evaporate because of experiencing a catastrophic illness. So I certainly have known a lot of people but nobody in my family.

JACKIE JUDD: Okay. Let me ask you a question apart from

Orleans when Katrina swept through. There are reports that suggest the country is not where it needs to be. What would you do to change that as President?

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: One of the things I would do, believe it or not, is I would contract with some private enterprises that deliver these kinds of services all the time. Fed-Ex and UPS know where a package is every moment of the day or night. Wal-Mart and Home Depot and other organizations are used to distributing and providing goods and services.

I think we ought to enter into contract with medical care providers, with the people who can deliver pharmaceuticals and much needed assistance and just call them rather than us stockpile billions of dollars of equipment and medical supplies some place that may end up, as ice did, in Maine during Katrina. We ought to use the efficiencies of the private sector in other words.

JACKIE JUDD: Okay. A final question and that has to do with HIV/AIDS. As you know, it remains a problem in the United States, particularly in the South particularly for African Americans, what is your policy on that? More funding? What is the answer?

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: I would be glad to devote more funding. It is such a horrible disease but I think education

JACKIE JUDD: Are you talking about ABCs?

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: m-Better abstinence is obviously something that I strongly believe in but I think that the only way you are really going to solve this problem is to one, make people aware of the dangers of AIDS and two, economic progress in America. I know that sounds like a big issue but when you look at the economic level of most Americans who are afflicted with AIDS.

It is because they are mired, frankly, in poverty without an opportunity to improve their lives. That is the overriding issue but certainly I believe in ABC and we could probably do a much better job in public education than we do today.

JACKIE JUDD: Thank you very much Senator John McCain.

SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: Thank you Jackie.

JACKIE JUDD: Thank you.

[END RECORDING]