

Idaho Statesman, Thursday, May 15, 2008 – Reader's View by Steven Millard

Learn candidates' health care stance

Health care continues to be a major concern for Americans. For several years, voters have identified health care as one of the top three issues in most major polls, with only the economy and war receiving higher levels of importance.

In Idaho, the focus includes not only reining in health care costs and improving quality, but also making certain enough providers (doctors, nurses, technical experts) are available to serve our communities. The shortage of physicians in all areas of our state will continue to plague us over the next two decades.

There is significant and growing debate about how to provide medical education and where the need is most crucial. Idaho employers, large and small, struggle to provide or continue providing health insurance. The uninsured and underinsured tax our overburdened system oftentimes being forced to forgo preventative care and seeking much more expensive treatment in emergency rooms. Medicare and Medicaid budgets cannot keep pace with the demand. With the primary elections just weeks away, it's time to review the campaign platforms in what promises to be a very important election. While we've been continuously bombarded by coverage of presidential candidates, getting information on our state and local races isn't always easy.

Fortunately for area voters, the Idaho Statesman has put together an online voters' guide to help aid in your study. Unfortunately, they missed a great opportunity to gain depth and insight into what our candidates are thinking and planning should they receive the voter's nod.

On the subject of health care, only one question was posed for state or county candidates. Congressional candidates had no questions on the important issue of health care. It is particularly important to hear from congressional candidates about health care as they will be faced with important votes on Medicare, Medicaid and funding of rural health programs. Here are some additional questions our candidates should answer:

- What is the role of government, federal or state, in providing health care coverage for all?
- If elected, what will you do to make inroads to reduce the number of uninsured or underinsured?
- What do you see as the single most important and immediate change that should be made in America's or Idaho's health care system?
- If elected, how will you work to decrease health care staffing shortfalls in Idaho?
- What is best for Idaho in terms of medical education? What are the priorities?
- What assets can you bring to address health care issues locally or nationally?

It's make or break time for America's health-care system. Five to 10 years from now, the health care landscape will be much different than it is today. Voters need to know what candidates are envisioning and will work toward as the system goes under the knife.

I very much appreciate the time and effort the Statesman staff expends in preparing the voter guide. I also hope it's a work in progress and we'll see more as we approach Nov. 4.

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