

Questions and Answers for HCAN Launch Press Conferences

Tough Questions on Reform

Q. Are you asking for a complete overhaul or incremental changes?

A. We need to make some important changes – like guaranteeing coverage; making it affordable to people and to businesses; being sure that the benefits are good. But in doing so we can build on what works in the current system.

Q. Do you support single-payer health coverage?

A. A properly designed single-payer system could meet our principles, but it's one of many approaches that would meet our principles.

Q. Is this socialized medicine?

A. That's the kind of scare tactics we'll see the insurance industry use to block reform. We are about allowing people to keep their private insurance if they want while being sure that insurance companies can no longer deny coverage to people with pre-existing conditions or raise our rates when we get sick. And we want to give people a choice of a public plan so they are not left at the mercy of private insurance.

Q. Is this like what they have in Canada (or somewhere)?

A. We are supporting a uniquely American solution to our health care mess. We will build on what works here while fixing what doesn't, starting by guaranteeing quality, affordable health care for all. In doing so we'll come up with a way that works best for America.

Q. Do you support mandating health insurance coverage?

A. We think the key issue is making health coverage affordable. Which means what you pay to get coverage and what you pay out of pocket. And being sure that the benefits meet your health care needs. If health coverage is really good and affordable, then virtually everyone will enroll. We haven't taken a position on mandates because we think that before we talk about mandates, we need to be sure health care is really good and affordable.

Q. How will you pay for your plan? How much will it cost?

A. We believe that families, employers, and government have a shared responsibility to pay for health care. And we believe that we need to make changes so that health care is affordable to families based on a sliding scale. It also needs to be affordable to employers so that the cost of health coverage is related to how much people earn at work. It needs to be affordable to taxpayers by controlling costs while improving quality. We're not supporting a particular plan so we don't have a cost to the

government, but various estimates have shown that we can easily pay for plans like this by rolling back the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy.

Q. Would you cover illegal immigrants?

A. We believe that immigrants should pay for health coverage like everyone else. We also want to be sure that whatever people's views are on immigration, that we don't let our differences there block moving ahead with health care reform. If we did that, only the insurance companies would benefit.

Q. Are you supporting any particular legislation?

A. No. We want to be sure that legislation passes in 2009 that meets our principles. There are a lot of ways to get there, but get there we must.

Q. What will Senator Clinton's role be in your campaign?

A. We'll approach Senator Clinton like we will approach all members of Congress – asking her to support our principles.

Q. How is this different than 1994?

A. One big difference is that you have the huge campaign you see today and around the country coming together on a common approach. Another difference is that last time, when the health insurance industry ran their Harry and Louise campaign to block reform, nobody fought back. This time we are ready, starting today. And most importantly, we are supporting an approach to reform that makes just the right amount of change. We would guarantee quality, affordable coverage while allowing people the choice of keeping the health insurance they have now or choosing a public plan.

Q. Where is the campaign's money coming from?

A. From the organizational members of the campaign, from individuals who support us, and from foundations.

Questions on Elections

Below are some basic answers to questions you may get on the role of HCAN in elections. It is very important that you keep to the same answers no matter how often the question is asked. If a reporter keeps asking these questions, it's because they want to bully you into giving an answer that you don't want to give. It's OK to repeat yourself until they stop asking or tell them that your answer won't change no matter how many times or ways they ask the same question.

Remember HCAN does not make endorsements and does not support or oppose any candidate, and many HCAN members cannot participate in electoral activities (other than non-partisan civic engagement). HCAN is about educating and rallying the country on HCAN's health care principles so that the next President and Congress will enact health care reform that meets our principles in 2009.

HCAN and Congress:

Q. Will you be asking candidates for Congress to sign the “Which Side are you On” statement?

A. We will be asking everyone to tell us which side he/she is on. It’s the first thing you see when you go to our website. We want to educate people about the choices the country faces about how to fix our health care mess and rally people around the choice of a guarantee of quality, affordable health care.

Q. Will you be working for candidates who support your principles?

A. No. HCAN is not a PAC, and we don’t support candidates. [If they ask about the legal structure of the organization: HCAN is a section 501(c)(4) issue advocacy organization. Members of the HCAN coalition include a broad range of tax-exempt organizations that are working to promote quality, affordable health care for all Americans.]

Q. But isn’t your campaign really aimed at elected candidates who support your principles?

A. No. Our campaign is about the issues and educating and motivating the next President and Congress to enact legislation in 2009 that guarantees quality, affordable health care for all.

HCAN and the Presidential race: Reporters are likely to try to get you to take sides directly in the presidential race. The HCAN principles of reform were developed long before the Presidential candidates were chosen and come from a long policy history among the HCAN Steering Committee.

HCAN does not make endorsements and is not taking sides in the election. HCAN wants all Americans, including members of Congress and the next President, to adopt our principles for reform.

Q. How do the Obama and McCain plans meet what you want?

A. Clearly the two candidates for President have very different approaches to health care. The differences in their approaches reflect very different philosophies about health care reform which have a history long before the 2008 presidential campaign.

Senator McCain’s approach is from the school that wants to make health insurance even more of a market commodity. Senator McCain has said that he wants to encourage more people to get private health insurance by taxing health benefits at work and providing a tax credit to buy private coverage. He doesn’t support regulating the health insurance industry or controlling premiums or insurance company profits. He’s said that government should pick up the cost of those whom the private insurance industry doesn’t want.

Senator Obama’s approach is from the school that says government has a responsibility to ensure that all Americans have access to health care coverage. Senator Obama has said that he wants to give people a choice between private insurance, the plans offered to Congress and other federal employees, and a public plan like Medicare. Senator Obama supports requiring a standard set of benefits and regulating private insurance industry practices like denying coverage for pre-existing conditions.

Q. So isn't the Obama approach the same as yours?

A. Senator Obama - as well as many other members of Congress - supports many of the same principles of reform that HCAN supports. HCAN is not supporting any particular plan – Senator Obama's or anyone else's. We are saying that health care reform must meet our principles. We are working to educate all Americans, including candidates for office, so that the next president and members of Congress from both parties will adopt our principles.

Q. So your campaign is really about supporting Obama and going after McCain.

A. Our campaign is about rallying the American people around a guarantee of quality, affordable coverage. We want to educate the public about our principles and make it clear to the next President and Congress that's what the country needs and what the people are demanding.