



# National Student/Parent Mock Election

## Teacher's Guide to 2008 Presidential Election Issues – Health Care

Researched and Written by Ivan and Kent Jurin

### Table of Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| OVERVIEW: Health Care – Costs and Availability .....   | 2  |
| OVERVIEW: Major Presidential Candidates’ Positions on Health Care Costs and Availability .....             | 3  |
| ACTIVITY: Compare and Contrast: Major Candidates’ Positions on Health Care Costs and Availability .....    | 5  |
| ACTIVITY: My Opinion – Do I Agree With the Candidates on Health Care Reform: Costs and Availability? ..... | 6  |
| OVERVIEW: The U.S. Constitution and Health Care .....  | 8  |
| ACTIVITY: Debate on the Ethics of Current Health Care in the United States:.....                           | 11 |
| ACTIVITY: Advocacy – Develop and Share an Opinion about Health Care Issues .....                           | 13 |
| ACTIVITY: Socratic Seminar – Should Health Care Be a Right Granted by the U.S. Constitution? .....         | 14 |

## OVERVIEW: Health Care – Costs and Availability

Presidential candidates John McCain and Barack Obama agree that the health care system in America is broken. They cite the rampant increase in health insurance costs to families and employers, the 47 million Americans that are not insured at all, and the general poor health of the country's population compared to the amount of money we spend on health services.

The United States is unique in the developed world because our health care system is not entirely provided by the government, such as in Britain or Canada. In those countries, every citizen receives free health insurance directly from the state, at no extra charge, other than paying one's taxes. In general, they also have the same or slightly better health results than us even though they spend considerably less money on health services than we do. For example, the average life expectancy in Britain and Canada are 78.8, and 80 years, compared to the U.S. with 78 years, even though we spent 15.2% of GDP in 2003 on healthcare, compared with Canada's 9.9%, and Britain's 7.8%.

The way the U.S. approaches healthcare is a mixture of public and private insurance. Most Americans get their health coverage from their employers, with others receiving coverage from the federal government by way of Medicare or Medicaid (lowest incomes), and still others from state governments with programs like CHIP (Children's Health Insurance Program). Because of the disparity in quality between varying types of insurance, and the huge number of Americans that have no health coverage at all, the need for a new national health care strategy is undeniable.

Our two political parties approach the problem in different ways. Democrats believe that the correct way to fix the coverage gap of 47 million Americans without health insurance is to mandate that all people buy their own insurance, and if unable to do so, the government should step in to subsidize their policies. The Republicans, in general, believe that the nation's healthcare system is best served with government taking as limited a role in it as possible, and are in favor of greater tax incentives to encourage employers to provide insurance to their employees.



## OVERVIEW: Major Presidential Candidates' Positions on Health Care Costs and Availability

**Directions:** This summary focuses on several significant issues within the larger campaign issue of health care, which is very complex. For more comprehensive descriptions and rationales, see the official web sites of the presidential campaigns. See "Sources" below.

After studying this issue through research and current events discussion, decide how you feel about each candidate's position for these three health care issues. Go to the "Comparing Presidential Candidates" chart in the next section to record your viewpoint on the candidates' policies. To help you decide, you can write an abbreviation next to each policy statement:

**SA** - strongly agree; **A** - agree; **SD** - strongly disagree; **D** - disagree; **N** - no opinion

### Costs of Health Care:

John McCain:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Supports importing prescription drugs to increase competition, leading to lower costs.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Supports opening health care markets by allowing providers to practice nationwide, rather than restricting them to regions.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Supports allowing health care insurance purchases across state lines to encourage competition.

Barack Obama:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Supports universal health care, such as the federal government purchasing prescription drugs in bulk to reduce costs.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Supports legislation to force the medical field (insurance companies, drug companies, hospitals, etc.) to be more cost-efficient and affordable for all Americans.

### Availability of Health Care Insurance:

John McCain:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Opposes universal health care.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Supports making health insurance innovative, portable, and affordable; mainly through government incentives for private insurance providers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Supports financial incentives to businesses to provide health care insurance.

Barack Obama:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Supports a mandate that all children have health care coverage.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Supports creating a national public insurance program that would allow individuals and small businesses to buy affordable health care similar to federal employee program.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Supports requiring all employers to contribute toward health coverage for their employees or toward the cost of the national plan.

Quality Health Care for all Americans

John McCain supports:

\_\_\_\_\_ Ensuring care for higher risk patients.

Barack Obama supports:

\_\_\_\_\_ A national program to provide affordable, accessible and quality healthcare to all Americans.

Other issues important to you: Use the candidate's websites cited below to learn their position.

Issue: \_\_\_\_\_

Summarize the candidates' positions on this issue on another sheet.

Sources:

Obama-McCain Comparisons at:

<http://www.obama-mccain.info/compare-obama-mccain-economy.php>

McCain campaign at:

<http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/issues>

Obama campaign at:

<http://www.barackobama.com/issues>

Links to other candidates at:

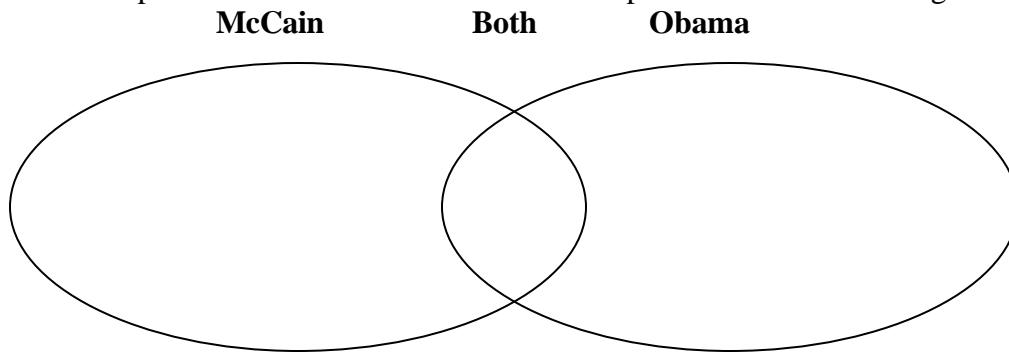
<http://www.politics1.com/p2008.htm>

Google Election Tools for Teachers at:

[http://www.google.com/educators/elections\\_tools.html](http://www.google.com/educators/elections_tools.html)

## ACTIVITY: Compare and Contrast: Major Candidates' Positions on Health Care Costs and Availability

1. Research the candidates' positions about
2. Health care reform. Use their official campaign web sites, campaign literature, and news reports and speeches that deal with this issue.
3. Use key words or phrases to record the candidates' viewpoints on this Venn Diagram :



Questions based on your research and the graphic organizer above:

1. Do McCain and Obama have any similar views or solutions for our country's health care system? If so, what are they and why did they agree on these specific topics?
2. On what health care issues do McCain and Obama differ the most? Describe the differences.
3. What might this comparison tell us about the differences between the Republican and Democratic Parties?
4. What are the ethical questions about health care issues? (right or wrong actions, beliefs)
5. Which candidate(s) is more likely to believe in the following statements about improving health care in the United States? Write **M** for John McCain and **O** for Barack Obama.

\_\_\_ Supports national, universal health care.

\_\_\_ Opposed to universal health care. Have families in charge of their health care.

\_\_\_ All children must have health care coverage, either from private or public sources.

\_\_\_ Require all employers to contribute to their workers' health coverage.

\_\_\_ Private enterprise is best for American health care.

\_\_\_ Believes that the American health care system is broken and needs significant reforms.

## **ACTIVITY: My Opinion – Do I Agree With the Candidates on Health Care Reform: Costs and Availability?**

**Directions:** Use your **Presidential Candidates’ Positions Sheet** to determine which candidate you agree with most about how to improve healthcare in our country. Write the key words or phrase representing you feelings about the candidate’s position on specific issues of: its high costs; quality of care, and availability to all citizens.

### **John McCain, Republican**

**Agree with his position on:** **Disagree with his position on:** **Uncertain or no opinion:**

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|

### **Barack Obama, Democrat**

**Agree with his position on:** **Disagree with his position on:** **Uncertain or no opinion:**

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|

**Optional: Third Party Candidate:** \_\_\_\_\_,

You will need to research the candidate's positions on the issue using their web sites. See:  
<http://www.politics1.com/p2008.htm>

**Agree with his position on:**                      **Disagree with his position on:**    **Uncertain or no opinion:**

| <b>Agree with his position on:</b> | <b>Disagree with his position on:</b> | <b>Uncertain or no opinion:</b> |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
|                                    |                                       |                                 |

**Your decision:** Based on your research and the completed chart above, which Presidential candidate do you agree most with their position about improving health care in our country? Explain why his plans are the best for making health insurance available to all Americans and controlling health care costs.

*For this issue I believe that \_\_\_\_\_ has the best plans to deal with our country's healthcare problems because:*



## OVERVIEW: The U.S. Constitution and Health Care

The Big Question: *What does the U.S. Constitution say about the federal government dealing with the problem of health care?*

Related questions: *Is quality health care a right for all Americans? Does the U.S. Constitution grant healthcare to all citizens? Can it be argued that the U.S. Constitution prohibits a national healthcare system? Are there ethical questions related to this campaign issue and social problem for many Americans?*

Whether or not the U.S. Constitution grants health care as a right to all American citizens comes down to modern interpretation of the Constitution. The Framers knew little about modern medicine or the need for medical care. The germ theory of disease did not arise until nearly a century after the U.S. Constitution was created. Therefore, it is up to future generations to determine what the Constitution says about health care, if anything at all. Usually, different viewpoints about what the U.S. Constitution grants or prohibits depend on whether one uses a loose interpretation -- permitting the Constitution to be adapted to modern situations, or a strict interpretation -- only what is clearly stated in the Constitution can be granted or prohibited. Here are excerpts from each interpretation as related to health care:

Example of loose interpretation or construction of the U.S. Constitution:

Health Care is a right contained within the US Constitution. Posted 12 October 2006

Source: Blog at:

[http://eternalhope.blog-city.com/health\\_care\\_is\\_a\\_right\\_contained\\_within\\_the\\_us\\_constitution.htm](http://eternalhope.blog-city.com/health_care_is_a_right_contained_within_the_us_constitution.htm)

“Health care is a basic right that is contained in the US Constitution. The Constitution was thought of by the Founding Fathers as a living document that could be adapted to changing times, much like the British Common Law. Jefferson and the rest of the founders recognized that times would change and that people would do things different than they would today. They also realized that their work was not complete and that it was not the final say. Thus, they wrote the Constitution in a way that would allow for great flexibility for future generations.

The first thing to keep in mind is the Ninth Amendment. It states that rights are not restricted because they are not specifically covered in the Constitution. This was designed to prevent future tyrants from saying that since a right was not specifically covered in the Constitution that they could take away our liberties.

The next amendment to be considered is the Tenth Amendment. It states that all rights not specifically given to the government should be specifically given to the states or the people. Thus, anything not specifically covered in the Constitution, such as the power to make war, is given as a right to the states and the people. This amendment was designed to declare this country as separate and distinct from the kings of Europe. In Europe, monarchs were specifically given all the rights in the universe such as the power of life and death and handed those rights out to the people or took them away as they saw fit. The Tenth Amendment states the exact opposite -- all rights not given to the government are given to the people.

This, however, cannot be used as an argument to abolish all laws within the country. If I, sitting in this library, were to shout bloody murder, I would be infringing on other people's right to study. If I were to sneak into someone's property and steal their things, I would be taking away their right to private property....

So, let us look at health care and how it applies here. The Equal Protection Clause states that everyone is to be treated equally. However, when we see the actual results of our broken medical system, it is obvious that there is gross inequality in our medical system that is completely contrary to the principles of the 14th Amendment. The wealthy people are able to get affordable treatment for their medical conditions, while even an \$85,000 income can be wiped out by exorbitant medical bills. Thus... there is a fundamental inequality within our system that flies in the promise of equality granted by the 14th Amendment.

Furthermore, there is another right that is lost that is a common thread throughout the bill of rights -- the right of people to pursue their own lives without hindrance. The basic premise of the Bill of Rights is that everybody should be allowed to pursue their own lives in peace and security. Yet an unequal health care system deprives people of the right to live their own lives in peace and comfort as set forth in the Bill of Rights.

There is another reason why health care is a basic human right under the Equal Protection Clause -- The establishment of a for-profit health care system is based on the premise that some lives are more valuable than others. We fought a Civil War in order to prove that all lives were equal. The Civil Rights legislation of the 1960's was based on the premise that all lives were equal. But the premise of our for-profit health care system is that all lives are equal, but some lives are more equal than others.

In interpreting the law, one must take into consideration the whole Constitution, not just the parts of it which are convenient to one's theories. Thus, one cannot claim, like Robert Bork does, that the Ninth Amendment is a piece of empty paper. If you take this position, then you are guilty of selective interpretation of the Constitution. And once you begin to pick and choose which parts of the Constitution you like and don't like, the law will have no meaning whatsoever, because everybody would have the opportunity to pick and choose which laws they will or won't follow.

The abuses of power in the Republican Congress are a direct result of this selective interpretation of the law and the clear meaning thereof.

It could also be argued that by so interpreting the Constitution, we are depriving corporations of their right to make money. But the 10th Amendment does not apply to corporations -- it applies to states and the people. Thus, the government has broad discretion in regulation of corporations under the Commerce Clause as opposed to regulating personal behavior.”

An example of a strict interpretation or construction of the U.S. Constitution as related to health care is found in the Op-ed article at:

[www.bizjournals.com/baltimore/stories/1996/08/12/editorial3.html](http://www.bizjournals.com/baltimore/stories/1996/08/12/editorial3.html) Excerpts are:

“Many people long for the old days when they simply went to the local doctor who was their total source of health care. There were no bureaucracies to deal with, no third party payers and life just seemed simpler.”

“Americans places a higher value on personal freedom and the preservation of each individual life than an other country. As a result, we will never truly ‘control the cost of health care.’ We are willing to go to extraordinary means to preserve the life of a premature baby, who not too many years ago could not have survived, or for transplants of hearts, kidney and livers. Virtually no one would want life-saving care to be denied to themselves or a loved one.”

Similarly, the Republican Party position is that the American health care system is currently the best because it is mainly done by privately-owned businesses and should be so is at:

<http://healthcare.gop.com/GroupPage.aspx> Their position is:

“Americans are fortunate to have the most advanced and innovative health care system in the world. The President's plan will make private health insurance more affordable and increase the number of Americans with health insurance. The plan will also help our nation move away from reliance on government-run health care and toward a system in which Americans have better access to basic, affordable private insurance, and increased ownership of their medical decisions.”

## **ACTIVITY: Debate on the Ethics of Current Health Care in the United States:**

### **Is it right that many Americans have limited or no health care benefits when other Americans have excellent benefits?**

*Is our government being unethical in its failure to provide equal quality health care to all American citizens?* Fairness and equality for all Americans are two principles of our democracy. However, 45 million Americans are uninsured and 108 million are underinsured, meaning that a major medical emergency could spell financial disaster for even middle-class families. “It’s not really the lack of coverage that has the middle class losing sleep. It’s an insurance system that covers too little, costs too much and leaves people afraid of falling through the cracks.” – From Lauren Barack’s “America’s health insurance crisis” at:

<http://articles.moneycentral.msn.com/Investing/HomeMortgageSavings/America'sHealthInsuranceCrisis.aspx?page=all>

Some critics of the current health care system believe strongly that the real issues of reform are about private enterprise’s control of American medical care and presidential election politics. Barbara Ehrenreich is critical of the interplay of a profit-first approach to American healthcare in her blog “Health Care vs. the Profit Principle” at:

[http://ehrenreich.blogs.com/barbaras\\_blog/2007/07/health-care-vs-.html](http://ehrenreich.blogs.com/barbaras_blog/2007/07/health-care-vs-.html)

Vicente Navarro, MD, PhD, an international expert on national healthcare programs, questions the ethics of the American system of healthcare, stating that “a lot of money is being made from people’s suffering.” Navarro claims that the real problem is that both the medical system and the electoral process in the United States are both privatized, meaning that money and political influence are the primary goals, not people’s health. Get Navarro’s article in Harvard Health Policy Review, Spring 2008 at:

<http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/~hhpr/currentissue/comic.pdf>

Do either McCain or Obama’s healthcare proposals deal with the issues described by Ehrenreich or Navarro? Read, analyze and compare their policy statements on **Ethics in Government** and on **Healthcare reforms** on their campaign websites at:

#### **Obama:**

Ethics issues at: <http://www.barackobama.com/issues/ethics/>

Healthcare reform at: <http://www.barackobama.com/issues/healthcare/>

#### **McCain:**

Ethics issues at: <http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/Issues/cb15a056-ac87-485d-a64d-82989bdc948c.htm>

Healthcare reform at: <http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/Issues/19ba2f1c-c03f-4ac2-8cd5-5cf2edb527cf.htm>

(You can also navigate through their websites to each issue.)

Prepare for your debate by viewing and analyzing the Presidential Debates by using DebateWatch at: <http://www.debates.org/pages/dwoverview.html>

Research this issue and its questions using Google Election Tools for Teachers at: [http://www.google.com/educators/elections\\_tools.html](http://www.google.com/educators/elections_tools.html)

\*Debate the essential questions from the perspective of: McCain/Republican support of privatized healthcare vs. Obama/Democratic support of a national health care system.

\*Students can blog their opinions using Google's teachers link or <http://www.imbee.com/>

**Suggested Debate (or Essay) Topics:**

- *Does the U.S. Constitution infer the right of equal, quality health care to all American citizens?*
- *Do the solutions to the health care problems come from legal, economic or ethical/moral viewpoint(s)?*

## ACTIVITY: Advocacy – Develop and Share an Opinion about Health Care Issues

Our democracy is only healthy if Americans actively participate in the political dialogue from which important decisions are made. This means citizens must be informed about the issues, then develop an opinion about the issues. But having an opinion is not enough. In a democracy citizens must communicate their opinions and beliefs to their elected representatives and to the public forum. This can be done in many ways: talk or write to your elected officials; attend and speak at public meetings; letters to editor; or participate in opinion polls (rare). A new way of expressing your opinions and dialoguing with other citizens is through internet blogs. A **blog** is an online social network in the form of an interactive journal that permits individuals to write their thoughts and read those of others; each in turn can respond with further thoughts. It can be done on a daily basis. Political dialogue has gone electronic.

After learning about the key issues about health care in the United States and its reforms, students develop their own opinions, which are first shared with the teacher. Students then share their opinions with the class, etc. about what should be done about health care in our country. They can support the position of a presidential candidate or propose their own solutions. (Students can also express their opinions about other election issues.) Listed below are blogs appropriate for educational use.

Social networking for students:

- Students in grades 2 – 7 can share their thoughts and ideas in a safe and supervised environment on **Imbee** at <http://www.imbee.com/> or its Kidsfluence blog at: [http://www.imbee.com/discover/groups\\_featured](http://www.imbee.com/discover/groups_featured)
- **Moodle** is a course-management system that helps teachers create their own online learning communities. “It uses social-networking concepts in an interactive environment, in a way that’s useful for both teachers and students.” See an article about educational blogs at: <http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3749885>
- **iCue**, created by NBC Learn (part of NBC News) provides a safe, educational social networking environment for students 13 and older at: <http://www.icue.com/> It also has many hours of current and historic video for student use and in the classroom. Click on *Decision '08* for election news, daily quiz, historical information about U.S. elections and a blog by clicking on Forums link at top of webpage.
- **National Public Radio’s** political blog at: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/politics/>
- **Google Election Tools for Teachers** links at:  
[http://www.google.com/educators/elections\\_tools.html](http://www.google.com/educators/elections_tools.html)

## **ACTIVITY: Socratic Seminar – Should Health Care Be a Right Granted by the U.S. Constitution?**

Pete Stark, U.S. Representative, 13<sup>th</sup> District California, has introduced an amendment to the U.S. Constitution to guarantee health care as a right in this country.

“The current state of health care system, if you want to call it ‘system,’ is bleak. Yet, Congress and the White House continue to ignore the problems we face, or worse yet, offer ideological solutions that only exacerbate our current ills.... access to ‘the best medical care in the world’ shouldn’t be determined by your income tax bracket.... we must be certain that everyone -- regardless of their income, race, education, or job status -- can access health care of equal, high quality. Today, only prisoners in the US enjoy this right.”

A recent CNN poll showed that 56% favored Obama on health care issues, while only 39% supported McCain. Both believe we need significant reforms. Obama proposes universal health care through federal programs. McCain favors improving the current privatized system, with “families in charge of their own health care.” It appears that a majority of Americans believe that health care should be universally available. This is one step away from health care being considered a right of all citizens. This issue will be important until significant reforms occur, especially with the large Baby Boomer population becoming senior citizens.

Students should analyze Representative Stark’s statement proposing a constitutional amendment granting quality health care to all Americans. Rep. Stark’s full statement introducing a House Resolution to amend the Constitution can be found at:

[http://www.house.gov/stark/news/109th/floorstatements/03-02\\_healthamend.htm](http://www.house.gov/stark/news/109th/floorstatements/03-02_healthamend.htm)

Information and procedures for Socratic teaching with Paideia Seminars can be found in the Paideia activity for the 2008 Energy Crisis Issue. Here are sample teacher questions to facilitate student discussion and analysis of the text and possible answers to the seminar’s essential question: **Should healthcare be a right granted in the Constitution?**

Opening questions - What is Stark proposing? Who is he critical of on this issue? How does he use American ideals to advocate his proposed amendment?

Core question - Why does Stark believe that healthcare should be a right? What evidence does Stark present to support his proposed amendment?

Closing question - What Presidential candidate is most likely to support Stark’s proposal? Why? Why would the other candidate be opposed to it? Would you support the ratification of this amendment? Is healthcare more an economic issue or an ethical issue?

**Students take a position** whether they support or oppose a healthcare rights amendment. Each student is given an opportunity to express that opinion with supporting information.

This activity could also lead into other activities such as:

- Debate;
- Students write an letter to the editor;
- Role play as new-appointed Secretary of Health and Human Services;
- Mock Congressional Hearing on the proposed amendment. (See NS/PME Teacher Guides for 2004 and 2006 for exemplars).