

Health care: Access, high costs an important Presidential issue, too

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benefit package to 24,000 clients by next June. In the past summer, there were about 55,000 people on the plan. The plan covers clients who do not qualify for the federal Medicaid.

"The numbers are going down," DHS spokesman Jim Sellers said. "We're not taking any new enrollments." Sellers said about one in seven Oregonians does not have health care coverage.

"Clearly what we have is what I call an access problem," Democratic state senate candidate Floyd Prozanski said, adding that individuals who are in real need of health care may have been bumped off the Oregon Health Plan or do not qualify for the plan.

"We need to expand health care services to the most vulnerable and that would include seniors, the disabled and children," Prozanski said. He added that it is vital to promote preventative type of care "because it saves us all money."

Recognizing the state's financial crunch, Prozanski said there is a need to maximize on available tax dollars to provide adequate care.

Apart from advocating for affordability, in the past, Prozanski has also voted for reduced costs for prescription drugs as well as the creation of a bulk purchasing program for prescription drugs to lower the health care costs incurred by state agencies and low-income seniors, according to his campaign Web site.

On the other hand, Republican state senate candidate Norm Thomas said in the long term, the most effective way to address the high costs of health care is to create health care savings efforts.

"In the short term we have to help people," he said, adding that the elderly are especially in need of aid to cover escalating costs.

Thomas said he was not sure exactly how this aid would be imple-

mented, adding that it would depend on how the state budget is used. He said too much is being spent on different things and the budget needs to be streamlined to cut down waste.

"There's a lot of work to be done and we have legislature that hasn't worked very hard on that for some reason," he said.

Congress and Senate candidates

Democratic U.S. Senate candidate Ron Wyden said one of the biggest issues in health care is millions of Americans without health insurance and an aging baby boom generation placing increasing demands on a health care system already short of funds.

"I think everyone should be entitled to quality, affordable health care, which is why I passed bipartisan legislation to give all Americans — not just the lobbyists for HMOs and drug companies — the strongest voice in finally achieving health care reform," he said in an e-mail statement.

Wyden said he is also working to pass legislation to ensure an affordable drug benefit for all seniors on Medicare through his bipartisan legislation to create bargaining power authority for seniors, encourage drug re-importation and watchdog drug prices.

Republican U.S. Senate candidate Al King said he is especially worried about young families and their ability to afford health care, adding that in the current system some people unfairly subsidize health care costs for others who cannot afford it.

"It's very tough to have an affordable health plan that covers the whole family," he said.

He suggested that everyone start their own health savings plan to cater for their needs. King also said he has a three-point plan to reform the health care industry. He said he wants to tackle malpractice suits with large settlements, where attor-

neys "rip off" the patients. He added that he also wants to put an end to "end-of-life heroics" where a patient's life is prolonged with machines even when there is no chance of revival, citing that these tactics can be very expensive.

"Those huge costs are being transferred to younger people," he said. Finally, King said he wants to reduce doctors' and nurses' government paperwork burden, so that they have more time to do what they were hired to do.

King said there is a need for more common sense solutions that do not always require spending more money.

"I'm not in favor of saying 'we've got a crisis, let's throw some money on it,'" he said.

Jim Feldkamp, Republican candidate for Congress, also is concerned about the cost of malpractice suits to the health care industry. Feldkamp's spokesman Scott Jorgensen said there is a need for court reform.

"The way the system is right now is that it's too easy to file frivolous lawsuits," Jorgensen said, adding that there are some doctors in Oregon who are "one lawsuit away from closing their doors."

Jorgensen said lawsuits are driving up insurance costs and there should be limits on large settlements given.

Jorgensen said Feldkamp believes one way to tackle the issue of access is to improve business and economy. He said if businesses are successful, then they are in a better position to provide good insurance packages for their employees.

On the Democratic side, candidate for U.S. Congress Peter DeFazio said having the best health care system in the world is not enough.

"If people can't access it, if they can't afford it, it doesn't do them any good," he said. He added lack of coverage forces people who don't have insurance to wait until they have a crisis and then it is even harder and

more expensive to treat.

DeFazio proposes that every American has a basic insurance package, which can be paid for on a sliding scale and with the government helping to pay for those who can least afford it.

He said there also needs to be reform in the pharmaceutical industry.

Citing the high costs of drugs in the nation, DeFazio says there should be policy changes that would enable Americans to get FDA approved drugs from other countries.

Apart from his support in Congress to increase funding for HIV/AIDS programs, DeFazio said he is also the principal sponsor of a bill to provide legal access to alternative medicines.

"It's a way to reduce health care costs," he said.

The national scene

Health spending takes up a huge chunk of the U.S. economy — an estimated \$1.6 trillion was spent in 2002, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation Web site. But about 45 million Americans do not have health coverage, making access to health care a key concern for many voters. Both President Bush and Senator Kerry have outlined plans to improve the health care system nationally.

In his "Agenda for America," Bush said health care in America needs to be reformed.

"We must build a modern, innovative health care system that gives patients more options and fewer orders and strengthens the doctor-patient relationship," Bush said in his plan.

The President plans to implement several programs including a billion-dollar campaign to extend coverage for children. Bush also wants a tax credit for low-income families to purchase health insurance or to purchase a low-premium, high-deductible health plan and a

healthsavings plan — the families will get up to \$2,000 for their premiums and \$1,000 for their health accounts. Other plans include allowing small businesses to band together to be able to negotiate better rates from insurance companies.

According to the plan, Bush also wants to open or expand 1,200 health centers to 6.1 million more Americans by 2006, especially in under-served communities. During his term, the president has also signed a new Medicare bill to provide better benefits to seniors and people with disabilities and has increased funding for abstinence and drug testing in schools. The full plan is available at www.georgebush.com.

Sen. John Kerry also has a plan which "stops spiraling costs, provides coverage for 95 percent of Americans, covers all children (and) allows Americans the same health care plan as members of Congress." Part of the plan includes making prescription drugs more affordable by getting rid of loopholes in patent laws that keep cheaper generic alternatives off the market.

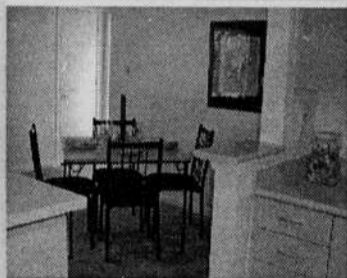
Kerry also plans to reduce malpractice litigation that is "meritless" by among other things, inhibiting individuals from filing suits unless a qualified specialist determines that a reasonable claim exists.

However, Kerry said he does not believe in placing caps on damages in the malpractice suits.

Kerry also wants to cut health administrative costs in half through the use of technology, such as private electronic medical records and the use of modern computerized methods for health transactions. Kerry's full plan is available at www.johnkerry.com/issues/health_care/health_care.html

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Alumnus: Green spoke about energy at University last Thursday

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because we hadn't discovered oil yet." Green spoke fondly about his time in Australia.

"Someone gave me a book about thorn birds and they are the epitome of an Aussie," Green said. "If I had to go into Thailand I'd go get two Aussies before I went, not Americans," Green said. "They worked through the day." He added that Australians are a major part of the ExxonMobil company now.

Green grew up in Washington and lived in the Puget Sound area. He got his bachelor's degree in geology from Washington State University in 1956. Following his graduation he spent three years in the Air Force, where he said he saved money for graduate school. He added that when he left the Air Force he had planned to go to graduate school in Washington until a professor told him that would be taking the "easy way out" because the University of Oregon taught soft-rock geology while Washington State only taught hard rock geology, which Green had already studied.

During his two years at the University of Oregon, Green spent most of his time doing field work and mapping in the surrounding areas of Eugene.

"I wanted to be where there were no people," Green said. "After being in the Air Force with a hydrogen bomb on my back, worried I'd have to obliterate Moscow, I thought people were crazy."

Green said his aspiration toward geology began when he worked in a logging camp in Washington. At age

ART GREEN

Graduated: 1962

Degree earned: Master's in geology

Big issues on campus at the time: Palestinians and Israelis, and the Cold War was at its peak.

Involved in: Spent time doing field work in Eastern Oregon

16, Green said he had the idea that in geology, he could climb mountains.

Since retiring from ExxonMobil, Green has joined the lecture circuit. Last Thursday Green returned to the University to give a free public talk focused on the ener-

gy outlook for the next 10 years, according to a University press release. Green will be giving 10 lectures this fall and another 10 in February. Also, as a trustee of the American Geological Institute, he will be involved in a four-part series airing on the Discovery channel about the evolution of planet earth.

While on the lecture circuit, Green has been accompanied by his wife of two years, Ann.

"He was busy traveling and I got another degree," Ann Green said. "We were both busy with our careers for a long time."

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