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## Questionnaire for Presidential Candidates

### Senator Joe Biden

#### **1. As President, what will you do to solve our nation's health care crisis?**

Everyone – adults and children, – should have access to health care in this country. We are 9 million children and 37 million adults short of that goal. Seventy percent of those people are in families with one or more full time worker.

I will be announcing a more detailed health care plan of action in coming months. It will meet the following goals: (1) insuring every child, (2) providing adults access to affordable health insurance; (3) assisting families and companies with the burdens of catastrophic cases; and (4) modernizing and simplifying our system.

The path toward universal coverage starts with the most vulnerable in our society. I would make sure that every child has health insurance – one way we can do this is by expanding the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) – and I would relieve families and companies of the burden of catastrophic cases.

Beyond that, we should evaluate the best way to provide coverage for the remaining uninsured. Let me be clear – to me it is not a question of if we're going to provide universal health care – but how we're going to do it.

I would support experimentation on the state level (like in Massachusetts and California) to determine how employer mandates and individual mandates work best. And I would support states, like my home state of Delaware, that are making the transition to electronic medical record systems that allow doctors and patients real-time access to records and help prevent dangerous and costly mistakes.

Focusing on universal access to health care isn't enough. Our national health care policy must also include a strategy to keep sky-rocketing costs in check. We can do that by modernizing the system, simplifying it and improving quality. We can modernize health care by using electronic records and providing doctors, nurses and pharmacists with vital histories and information in real time. We can simplify health care by moving to one, universal claims form – some states have already done this and are reducing administrative costs. We can improve health care by taking the best medical practices and applying them to disease management. We must do a better job of promoting prevention and wellness and making sure that people who suffer from common chronic diseases like heart disease and diabetes have adequate access to care, can afford medication and are able to manage and treat their illness and avoid serious complications.

#### **2. As President, how will you address the crisis in climate change and the broader need to protect our environment?**



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The next President must do two things: (1) pursue a national energy policy to significantly reduce our dependence on oil and (2) put us on a corrective course to slow global warming.

We need a substantial national commitment – an Apollo Project – to dramatically increase investment in energy and climate change research and technology so that that United States becomes the world leader in developing and exporting alternative energy and energy efficiency technology. Instead of buying solar panels and other technology from abroad we should be making it here in this country.

In addition I propose we do the following to significantly reduce our need for oil:

- Require all new cars to be flexible fuel vehicles by 2017 that can run on regular gas or home-grown fuel like ethanol. Currently just 5 million cars can do that – every new car in America should be able to.
- Require big companies - those that operate more than 4,500 gas stations - to add alternative fuel pumps so that at least a quarter of all gas stations nationwide have them by 2017.
- Improve the fuel economy of their vehicles by at least 1 mile per gallon every year with a goal of reaching a fleetwide average of 40 miles per gallon by 2017. We can do that by adopting a more flexible system that set fuel economy targets based on individual vehicle size and weight. If we increased our fuel economy standards by just 13 miles per gallon from 27.5 miles per gallon to 40 miles per gallon we would eliminate the need to import oil from Saudi Arabia or Venezuela. If we got 100 miles per gallon from domestically made plug-in hybrid vehicles we could eliminate our need for oil from unstable regions like the Middle East. We should couple these new requirements with incentives for domestic manufacturers to retool to protect domestic automobile manufacturing.
- Invest in the technology that our domestic car manufacturers need to be competitive with foreign manufacturers. For example, the Japanese dominate the market for lithium ion batteries that go into hybrids. That's because they've been investing millions in the technology for years. The Chinese and Koreans aren't far behind. We are playing catch-up and need to move quickly – we should at least double the current investment in the research and development of these batteries (increase it from \$40 million a year to \$100 million a year).
- Establish a Renewable Portfolio Standard to grow the renewable energy market. Just 2 percent of our energy comes from renewable sources – like solar, geothermal and wind power --we have to do better.
- Get serious about energy efficiency – all of us have a part to play in using energy more effectively. We should expand the energy star program for appliances, make federal facilities more energy efficient and make efficient technologies, like compact florescent light-bulbs easily available for everyone.



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Reducing use of fossil fuel and increasing our energy efficiency will also help reduce the greenhouse gas emissions which are causing global warming. But in order to really slow climate change our goal should be to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent by the middle of this century.

We need to do two things: (1) get our own emissions under control by capping them and (2) rejoin the rest of the world in finding a global solution to this problem. The United States is the biggest polluter – and we have an obligation to lead here – but climate change is a global problem that requires a global solution. That’s why I have been calling – and will continue to call on – this administration to return to international negotiations. We need a new climate change treaty. Other big polluters like China must be subject to similar restrictions. Doing so will protect the planet and jobs here in the United States.

**3. As President, how will you address the glaring deficiencies and persistent failures of so many schools in our public education system? How will you encourage access to higher education for all Americans?**

My mother has an expression: “children tend to become that which you expect of them.” I want a country where we expect much from America’s children. Every child must graduate from high school. Every qualified student should get a minimum of an associates’ degree.

We are far from there. Two-thirds of students entering high school graduate. For every 100 9<sup>th</sup> graders, just 18 earn a degree within 6 years of graduating high school. I will set four goals to get us there: (1) start earlier; (2) put a well-paid, effective teacher in every classroom; (3) reduce class sizes; and (4) graduate every student from high school and help those that are qualified to go on to two or four years of college.

If there is one thing we know from research and experience, it is that a child who goes to preschool with books, structure, and activities, starts school better prepared. She has a better shot of making it to middle school with grade-level reading and math skills, graduating high school, and going to college. Studies have shown the results. Of kids from similar low income backgrounds who were enrolled in quality preschool 65 percent graduated from high school where just 45 percent of non-preschoolers did. The lesson here is focus on the bookends of school: start earlier and finish strong

That’s why I support moving toward a 16 year public school system where every parent who wants to can send their child to pre-school and where every student goes on to at least two years of higher education.



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There are 4 million 4 year olds in the US and 4 million 3 year olds. We should have a preschool system that accommodates them all. We can start down that path by fully funding Head Start so that we double the number of children it serves and quadruple the number of toddlers in Early Start (\$27 billion over the next five years).

Finishing strong by increasing access to higher education is also essential. Pell grants and incentives to pay for college haven't kept pace with rising tuition costs. My college ACCESS plan would expand help for middle class families paying for college by creating a refundable \$3,000 tax credit – which would cover the average tuition at two-year colleges and cover more than half the average tuition. The ACCESS plan would expand Pell grants to \$5,100 next year (the maximum grant is \$4,310) and to \$6,300 in five years. I also support setting goals and start talking to kids in 8th and 9th grade about their plans for higher education by telling them how much assistance – either from grants or tax credits -- they will receive to pay for college. It is too late to have that conversation their senior year.

In between this early start and strong finish, let's focus our national education policy on two things: small classes and effective teachers. We can do that by: (1) retaining our teachers and (2) attracting good people to the profession.

Half of all new teachers leave the profession in 5 years and teacher attrition costs our schools \$2 billion a year.

For \$3 billion we could transform the way we prepare and support teachers as well as improving teacher pay by: (1) funding mentoring and induction programs for all new teachers so that we can better attract and retain those new to the profession, (2) creating a service scholarship program that would increase the supply of high quality teachers by providing them with scholarship money to defray the costs of education in exchange for a four-year commitment to teaching in a high need school, and (3) designing incentives to reward high quality and effective professional development like National Board Certification.

#### **4. As President, what will you do to end discrimination and promote equality for all, regardless of race, gender, religion or sexual orientation?**

The next President will face no more important decisions than his or her appointments to the Supreme Court. Some people said I was too tough on Roberts and Alito last year, but I believe the Senate wasn't tough enough. These two men have turned the Court on its head. Take race and gender discrimination. In recent decisions, they provided the majorities to turn back the clock by fifty years. As President, I will do everything in my power to turn that around. Throughout my career, I have been a strong supporter of affirmative action and have opposed Republican attempts to ban affirmative action in



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federal contracts and to bar funds to administer affirmative action programs. We must do more to prevent employment discrimination as well. While workplace discrimination is not as obvious as when my ancestors faced “Irish Need Not Apply,” signs, today minorities, women, and gays hear excuses like, “she won’t fit in,” or “he’s too qualified,” as employers pass on them. It may be subtle, but it’s hate in the heart, nevertheless. Because of this, I support the Employment Non-Discrimination Act to prohibit job discrimination of any kind.

We must also make a serious commitment to ending discrimination in the form of access to educational opportunities. We must work to close the achievement gap and to make sure that every child in this country is getting a good education. We can do this by increasing our support to early childhood education and preschool, making sure there is an effective teacher in every classroom – particularly in schools that are struggling; and by reducing class size. We need to make sure that every qualified student has the ability to pursue a higher education degree as discussed in my answer to the question three above.

### **5. As President, what will you do to life hard-working American families out of poverty?**

We should take back the Bush tax cuts from the very wealthy and instead invest in health care and retirement security; preschool; teachers and class size reduction; expanding the tax benefits (like the Earned Income Tax Credit) for low income people; and affordable housing. Equally important, we must protect workers’ rights to organize and raise the minimum wage.

First, health care. The path to universal care starts with insuring every child. We have to move toward a universal system. But our first goal should be immediately insuring every child by expanding the Childrens Health Insurance Program to cover every eligible child.

Second, retirement security. We must protect social security, not privatize it. We must protect defined-benefit pensions by making sure they are fully funded. Make personal saving easier for workers who don’t have pensions by requiring employers to contribute to 401k-type funds and allowing workers to carry with them the same retirement accounts from job to job.

Third, improve education. Preschool should be available for every child. In addition we need to invest more in our teachers and attract and retain talented people to the profession. Half of all new teachers leave the profession in 5 years. We should pay our teachers more. And we should focus again on reducing class size in the early grades. Finally, we need to expand Pell Grants and create a single refundable tax credit of \$3,000 so that a college education is affordable for everyone.



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Fourth, affordable housing. We should crack down on predatory lending. We should fund Section 8 vouchers to meet the needs of people who are eligible. Only one in three eligible families gets assistance. Hundreds of families living in high rent cities have no place to go. We should also help states and local governments build affordable housing by doubling funding for Community Development Block Grants. Finally we should expand the Low Income Housing Tax Credit to lower the financing of housing developments so that rental prices are more affordable.

Finally, we have to protect workers rights to negotiate good wages and good benefits with their employers. This administration has lined up 10 deep to strip away about 100 years of labor progress. We can slow them down by passing the Employee Free Choice Act. But we won't be able to stop them until we have a Democrat in the White House.

## **6. As President, what will you do to ensure that our seniors have financial and medical security?**

Retirement security requires several things: Social Security, pensions and personal savings, and affordable health insurance.

First, I would protect social security, not privatize it.

Second, I would protect defined-benefit pensions, discourage movement to contribution plans and insist on greater security for workers in the private sector who have pensions which are chronically underfunded. That's why I supported the Pension Reform Act last year that required greater company funding and strengthened the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation that was facing deficits exceeding \$23 billion.

Third, I would make personal saving easier for workers who don't have pensions by requiring employers to contribute to retirement accounts, automatically enrolling people in retirement accounts, and making it easy for workers to take retirement accounts with them when they change jobs.

I would work to improve the Medicare Part D Prescription Drug program as the present plan is complicated and has not done enough to keep costs down. I support allowing the Federal Government to directly negotiate for better drug prices with the pharmaceutical companies which would lower the cost to consumers. I would also close the 'doughnut hole' gap in overage that occurs once a retiree hits \$2,250 in coverage.

I would stabilize the way Medicare determines reimbursement rates for physicians and other providers. As such, I want the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission to study and report to Congress on replacing the use of the sustainable growth rate as a factor in



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determining the update for such payments with a factor that more fully accounts for changes in the unit costs of providing physicians' services. I also support treating mental health services the same as physical health services and urges a gradual reduction from 50 percent to the standard 20 percent by 2009 of co-payment rates for outpatient psychiatric services under the Medicare program.

### **As President, what is your plan for fixing our broken immigration system?**

I support efforts to reform our broken immigration system. We have to find a reasonable way to deal with the estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants living and working here. Those who play by the rules should be given a way to come out of the shadows. Any temporary worker program should be modest and tailored to meet an immediate, obvious need as a short-term solution.

Massive deportation is not who we are as a nation, and it's not the least bit feasible. Of the millions of undocumented immigrants living here, at least 1.6 million are children. Deportation is impractical, at best; costing an estimated \$206 billion over 5 years. It would take more than 200,000 buses, extending in a line 1,700 miles from San Diego to Alaska to deport 12 million people.

But I don't think we'll fix this until dynamics on both sides of the border change. As long as people can't find good-paying jobs in their home countries, they will find a way to come here. Until we get serious with U.S. employers who hire undocumented workers, undocumented immigrants will have plenty of incentive to take the tremendous risk to cross the border illegally.

We must make employers accountable. Economic growth should not be built on the broken backs of desperate people.