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Submitted by Sen. John Edwards

Questionnaire for Presidential Candidates

The following four issues were a priority for a substantial majority of participants. It is essential that we hear your views on these questions.

ISSUE AREA: HEALTH CARE. Our health care system is in disarray. The cost of private health insurance is increasing at an annual rate in excess of 14 percent, far outpacing wages. Individuals are paying more out of pocket and receiving fewer benefits. 46.6 million Americans, including nine million children, are uninsured, and the number of uninsured is on the rise. States, suffering severe fiscal problems, are cutting eligibility and benefits in Medicaid and other health programs. Tens of thousands of people die from medical errors each year. Vital medical information continues to be withheld from pregnant women, sexually active teenagers, and populations at risk for STDs, while 87 percent of U.S. counties have no abortion provider.

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

I was proud to be the first major presidential candidate to propose a specific plan to guarantee quality affordable health care for every man, woman and child in America. Under my plan, businesses will either cover their employees or help pay their premiums. The government will make insurance affordable through new tax credits and by leading the way toward more cost-effective care. New "Health Care Markets" will give families and businesses purchasing power and a choice of quality plans, including one public plan based on Medicare. Finally, once these steps have been taken, all American residents will be required to take responsibility and get insurance.

America spends more per person on health care than anywhere else in the world, but the results of all that spending are often disappointing. Under my plan, families without insurance will get coverage at an affordable price. Families that have insurance today will pay less and get more security and choices. Businesses and other employers will find it cheaper and easier to insure their workers. I have proposed steps that will save an average family \$2,000 to \$2,500 a year and eliminate at least \$130 billion a year in wasteful health care spending.

Structural reforms in my plan will achieve significant savings. Universal coverage will bring down premiums. The cost of caring for the uninsured adds \$922 to an average family policy. Health Care Markets will bring down costs for small businesses through negotiating power and administrative efficiencies. Giving individuals in Health Care Markets a choice of insurance plans including a public plan based on Medicare will force

private insurers to operate in a more competitive market holding down costs and improving care.

There is so much we can and must do to improve the quality of care Americans receive. I have called for a new era in chronic and preventive care -- requiring providers to proactively manage diseases like diabetes, offer preventive care for little or no cost and promote healthy lifestyles to combat obesity. My plan will also reduce medical errors by helping doctors use technology to make medical decisions, and promoting evidence-based medicine so best practices become contagious.

Protecting access to reproductive health service is no less important, and is essential to the full equality and dignity of women. I also support comprehensive, age-appropriate sex education for young people.

ISSUE AREA: ENVIRONMENT. Our world is waking up to the implications of the damage we have done to our environment. The flow of ice from glaciers has doubled in the past decade. If nothing is done, sea levels could rise up to 20 feet. There are twice as many Category 4 and 5 hurricanes as there were 30 years ago. Without action, global warming will cause an estimated 300,000 deaths a year by 2035. Pollution continues to do damage. Nine million children have been diagnosed with asthma; between 1980 and 1994, the number of children under 5 with asthma increased by 160%. Each year, 1.8 million to 3.5 million illnesses are caused by swimming in water contaminated by sewage overflows and an additional 500,000 from drinking contaminated water.

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

The energy crisis is serious. Due to global warming, we could live on a dramatically different planet within decades. Meanwhile, America's need for imported oil forces it to rely on unstable and even hostile countries.

Our generation must be the one that ends our nation's dependence on oil and ushers in a new energy economy. If we harness American ingenuity, we can emerge from the crisis of global warming with a new energy economy that stimulates innovation, brings the family farm back to life, and creates jobs in America's farms and industries.

I have proposed a market-based approach to ending global warming and leading the world to a new global climate change treaty. I will set an economy-wide limit on the emission of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, reducing emissions by at least 80 percent by 2050. At the same time, a cap-and-trade system will use market forces to reduce pollution in a cost-effective and flexible manner and the sale of permits will finance investment in a New Energy Economy Fund.

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Second, I will create a new energy economy and 1 million new jobs by investing in clean, renewable energy. The New Energy Economy Fund would jumpstart clean, renewable, and efficient energy technologies, taking into account both energy and economic needs.

Finally, I will meet the demand for more electricity in the next decade through efficiency, instead of producing more power. It is often cheaper and cleaner to save energy rather than produce more of it. It is time we asked Americans to be patriotic about something other than war.

ISSUE AREA: EDUCATION. A high-quality public education is essential to ensure opportunity for all Americans. In 2000, 2 out of 3 fourth graders couldn't read proficiently and 7 out of 10 inner-city and rural fourth graders couldn't read at the most basic level. The most recent data on urban 12th graders finds that 84% are not proficient in math and 83% are not proficient in science. For students who do graduate, attending college now means taking on substantial debt as costs have risen and grants are scarce. Between 1994 and 2004, college costs skyrocketed by 30% and 26% at public and private colleges, respectively.

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

I believe every child in America should have the same opportunity, regardless of the family they come from or the color of their skin. But more than 50 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, our education system remains shockingly unequal. There are nearly 1,000 high schools where more than half of the students won't graduate. Low-income 12th-graders read at the same level as middle-class ninth-graders. Students in poor neighborhoods and minority students are twice as likely to get an inexperienced teacher and 60 percent more likely to get an uncertified teacher.

There is no shortage of work to be done. We should invest in our teachers, the most important resource for our children's success at school. We need to do more to recruit them, train them, and pay them, particularly in math and science and other places where there are teacher shortages. We should give more support to new teachers and let successful teachers serve as mentors. We need to expand preschool for three- and four-year-olds. We need a serious, sustained effort to turn around struggling schools.

Our education system's emphasis on cheap standardized test scores shortchanges our children and fails to provide the skills they need for the future such as math and science, creativity and critical thinking. We need to strengthen our curriculum and use more sophisticated measures to assess our children's learning. Every day you can read reports

about how we're falling behind in math and science. Our ninth-graders are 18th in the world in science education.

We also need to address the dropout crisis. Many dropouts realize dropping out was a mistake. America is about second chances, so we should have “second-chance schools” to lift up former dropouts, offering them one-on-one attention and a chance to earn a diploma at night or at a local community college.

I have released a plan called College for Everyone to make college more affordable and reduce student debt. It will pay for one year of public-college tuition, fees, and books for more than 2 million students. In return, students will be required to work part-time in college, take a college-prep curriculum in high school, and stay out of trouble. I also support other steps to make college more affordable, including increasing the maximum Pell Grant and making student loans more affordable.

Banks that make student loans receive large federal subsidies and a guarantee against default. However, millions of students have borrowed directly from the U.S. Department of Education, receiving loans that have very similar terms but are far less expensive for taxpayers. I will let all students borrow directly from the U.S. Department of Education, freeing up almost \$6 billion a year to make college more affordable.

The application for student aid, known as the FAFSA, is needlessly complicated and longer than many tax forms. Many students and families need classes to help fill it out, and 1.5 million high school students do not apply for aid even though they are eligible. I would dramatically simplify the application process by using information the federal government already has, eliminating two-thirds of the questions.

However, aid alone is not enough. Too many students lack the encouragement and guidance they need to apply to college. In some large cities, a single counselor must serve more than 700 students. I will help every low-income high school eligible for Title I hire a new college counselor, helping students choose college-track courses and navigate the admissions and financial aid process.

ISSUE AREA: CIVIL RIGHTS. Despite significant progress, discrimination is still a reality for too many Americans. For every dollar white men earn, women earn approximately 77 cents, Latinas earn 56 cents, and African-American men earn 75 cents. Women are more likely to suffer violence; a woman is raped every 6 minutes and battered every 9 seconds. At the federal level and in most states gays and lesbians lack even basic civil rights protections. Affirmative action is being eliminated from the public sector, with colleges becoming increasingly homogeneous and opportunity blocked for many black and Latino students.

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

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The reality of women's lives in America today is that they still face greater challenge in the workplace and greater responsibilities at home. I believe that we must do more to strengthen families and help women succeed at work to build a larger, more secure middle class. I support the Paycheck Fairness Act to strengthen the remedies for sex discrimination and deter wrongdoing, expanding resources for female entrepreneurs through a new small business initiative and prioritizing the needs of women-owned businesses in existing programs. We must also continue work to end violence against women, an issue I spoke up for in the Senate, where I introduced three bills to address the health care needs of women affected by domestic and sexual violence.

Slavery followed by segregation followed by discrimination has had an impact that still is alive and well in America, and it goes through every single part of American life. We still have two public school systems, two health care systems and even two voting systems in America. We have so much work to do to build One America where every American – regardless of the color of their skin, their sexual orientation, or the country where their parents were born – has the same chance to succeed.

We need to secure voting rights in communities of color by restoring the right to vote in all federal elections to ex-offenders who have served their sentences; requiring paper ballots in all voting machines while facilitating access for the disabled and speakers of minority languages; and allowing voters in federal elections to register on Election Day.

To open the door to a higher education for millions of young people, we must continue to support affirmative action and enact a College for Everyone initiative so that every young person who is willing to work hard has the chance to get an education and get ahead. I signed an amicus brief in the University of Michigan affirmative action case, but the current Supreme Court has turned *Brown v. Board of Education* on its head. I will choose judges who are committed to protecting the civil and constitutional rights of all Americans, and strengthen the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice.

LGBT Americans are entitled to equal respect and dignity under our laws. I believe that all couples in committed, long-term relationships should have the same rights, benefits, and responsibilities, whether they are straight couples or same-sex couples. Workers should be judged by the quality of their performance, not their sexual orientation or gender identity. I oppose the current "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy on gays and lesbians serving in our military. Everyone is entitled to live in dignity without fear of violence – as president, I will sign a comprehensive hate crimes bill.

We recently celebrated the 17th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, but we must reclaim the ADA. Hostile, conservative judges have put new barriers in front of Americans with disabilities who seeking nothing more than the right to work and live with dignity. Congress should pass the ADA Restoration Act to ensure that the law

remains consistent with Congress' original intent. And we must go further, with new initiatives to break down the barriers that separate people from disabilities from opportunity in America, at home, at school and at work.

The following three issues were a top priority for a significant number of participants. We would appreciate hearing your views on these questions as well.

ISSUE AREA: WAGES. Millions of working families struggle to make ends meet because their jobs fail to pay a living wage. Wages have fallen by 3.2% in real terms since October of 2001, while inflation and costs of living continue to rise. With the federal minimum wage stuck at \$5.15/hour for almost 10 years, 31 states have recognized the inadequacy of \$11,000/year and raised the minimum wage on the state level. Still, there are an estimated 7.4 million Americans who are classified as working poor.

As President, what will you do to lift hard-working American families out of poverty?

The American people are hungry to be inspired and tackle the hard challenges we face. There is no better opportunity than the challenge of poverty. I have challenged America to set an ambitious goal that could fundamentally change our country: eliminate poverty within 30 years. To get there, I have proposed major new initiatives to reward work, create opportunity and strengthen families.

Despite its recent increase to \$5.85 per hour, the minimum wage remains a national disgrace. Even next year's scheduled increase is not enough to keep a single parent with one child working full-time out of poverty. As president, I will increase the reward to working by raising the minimum wage to \$9.50 an hour by 2012 and protect workers from routine abuses of minimum wage, overtime, and safety laws. Our tax code should do more to reward work too. I will triple the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) for adults without children and cut the EITC marriage penalty.

Every American should have the chance to work their way out of poverty, but some willing workers cannot find jobs because of where they live, a lack of experience or skills, or other obstacles like a criminal record. I will create a million short-term jobs to help individuals move into permanent work. To make more jobs good jobs, I will also support the right of workers to choose to join a union and work to pass the Employee Free Choice Act.

Second, our current housing policies concentrate low-income families together, isolating willing workers from entry-level jobs and children from good schools. I will create a million vouchers over five years to help low-income families move to better neighborhoods. At the same time, I will phase out housing projects that tie families to

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certain locations and are often lower quality and more expensive than private sector alternatives. To invest in struggling neighborhoods, rather than abandoning them, I will replace dilapidated housing in areas of concentrated poverty.

Third, we should help working families save. I have proposed new Work Bonds to help low-income, working Americans save for the future. Affordable bank accounts for the 56 million Americans without them and new regulations against payday loans will help struggling families get ahead.

Fourth, our system of public education should be our sturdiest ladder of opportunity. I have proposed expanding access to preschool programs, investing more in teacher pay and training to attract good teachers where we need them most, and strengthening high schools with a more challenging curriculum. As many as one-third of all students drop out of school, and the rates are even worse for poor and minority students. I will create second-chance schools to help former dropouts get back on track. I will also provide new federal resources to promote economic diversity within school districts and across district lines. My College for Everyone initiative will help more than 2 million students go on to higher education.

Finally, we must encourage strong and responsible families. Welfare reform required mothers to work and helps them find jobs, but it failed to do the same for fathers. I will help fathers find work, require them to help support their children, and increase child support collections by more than \$8 billion over the next decade and use those payments to benefit children. I will invest in home visits by registered nurses to low-income new parents, and family literacy programs, which address the educational needs of both parents and children. We also need to address the American teen pregnancy rate, which is one of the highest in the industrialized world.

ISSUE AREA: SENIORS. Seniors in America remain increasingly vulnerable. Half of today's workers do not have any retirement plan on the job and more employers have stopped offering guaranteed pension benefits. Americans' savings rate is now less than zero; only about half of families have any retirement savings. Seniors who want to remain independent are forced into nursing homes, instead of receiving personal care at home or in assisted living facilities. Health care costs continue to claim a greater share of seniors' fixed income.

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

Savings allow families to build better futures by paying for education, buying homes, starting small businesses, and putting money away for retirement. Savings also allow

families to survive challenges like the loss of a job or an illness, without leaving themselves vulnerable to high-cost credit card debt, payday loans, or other abusive loans.

We need to strengthen defined benefit pensions which, for a century have allowed workers, particularly unionized workers, to retire with security and dignity. Too often, however, employers have not kept their promises to workers. We need to protect these workers and ensure they do not lose retirement benefits. I will also ensure the Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation remains solvent and that executives do not walk away with millions while companies are going bankrupt.

I have offered a series of proposals to help families save and get ahead including a new “Get Ahead” tax credit to match up to \$500 a year in savings for families earning up to \$75,000; new “Work Bonds” will offer additional targeted savings incentives for low-income families; a new exemption on each family’s first \$250 in interest, capital gains, and dividends will allow working families to get a start on saving tax-free; and a new tax credit for financial institutions will promote offering low-fee, low-balance accounts to low-income families; allow families to deposit part or all of their child tax credit into a tax-free saving account.

I am committed to protecting Social Security, one of the most successful government programs in history. It lifts 13 million senior citizens out of poverty every year. I strongly oppose President Bush’s efforts to privatize Social Security, which would cut guaranteed benefits and risk individuals’ Social Security funds in the stock market.

Ultimately, we cannot solve Social Security or Medicare without a package of reforms that earns the support of both Democrats and Republicans. Like the Greenspan commission appointed in 1981 – when the trust fund had only two years left – any solution should be non-ideological, strongly bipartisan, and committed to the goals of ensuring every American can retire with dignity and extending the life of the Trust Fund.

Skyrocketing health care costs are becoming unaffordable for the government, just like they are for families and businesses. The first step toward extending the life of Medicare is universal health care reform that makes health care more cost-effective.

We can also make Medicare dollars go further with investments in preventive and chronic care, electronic medical records, and promoting proven cost-effective care. The 23 percent of Medicare beneficiaries with five or more chronic conditions account for 68 percent of costs. Yet Medicare makes almost no effort to coordinate care to ensure that doctors do not provide duplicative treatments and do not unknowingly undercut each other's efforts. I will reform Medicare to ensure that providers pro-actively manage chronic diseases to avoid unnecessary problems and hospitalizations. I will invest in technology and programs that allow doctors to share information, preventing conflicting prescriptions and duplicative tests.

Instead of strengthening Medicare for our seniors, George Bush has surrendered it to the drug companies and HMOs. When I am president, I will rewrite this drug bill to put

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patients and people above drug companies and HMOs. I will clamp down on skyrocketing drug costs by empowering the government to negotiate better drug prices. And I will stop the overpayments of insurance companies through Medicare and use the savings in part to ensure that low-income Medicare beneficiaries have access to the care they need.

To help Americans who need long-term care and to contain costs, I will reform the long-term care system to emphasize choice for older Americans and people with disabilities, provide home and community care whenever possible, and promote dignity and respect for families and workers.

ISSUE AREA: IMMIGRATION. America is a nation of immigrants. Yet today's immigrants face an atmosphere of hostility, violence, and a badly broken system of laws. Employers depend on immigrant labor, but recent policies have emphasized only enforcement, leading to worker exploitation. From 1986 to 1998, the border patrol budget increased sixfold and the number of agents on the southern border doubled to 8,500. Despite these efforts, millions of undocumented immigrants arrived to work in our fields, hospitals, and restaurants. Only 5,000 visas per year are granted for unskilled workers.

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

People who are already here should have the opportunity to earn American citizenship. Before earning citizenship, immigrants must avoid a criminal record, pay a fine in recognition that they came here illegally, and learn English—the surest path to success in this country. However, a path to citizenship that is overly burdensome will keep immigrants in the shadows.

Our immigration policies should bring families together, not keep them apart. I believe family reunification is an important value that should be preserved in our immigration laws. We should remove barriers to family reunification, not build new ones.

At the same time, our security is threatened by borders we cannot control. I believe that the first step in overhauling the immigration system is to secure our borders and stop illegal trafficking. We need to increase the number of border patrol agents and invest in surveillance technology to police the borders. We also need to crack down on employers that employ undocumented immigrants and, in many cases, abuse their workers.

America is a land of equals, not a land of first-class citizens and second-class laborers. I oppose new temporary guest worker programs that do not provide adequate workplace protections and a reasonable path to citizenship. If we invite you to work in America, we

should invite you to become an American with all the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

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