



11350 Random Hills Road, Suite 800, Fairfax, Virginia 22030 Phone (703) 934-6101 Fax (703) 352-3678

[fff@fff.org](mailto:fff@fff.org) [www.fff.org](http://www.fff.org)

## **Health-Care Hilarity**

**by Scott McPherson**

Massachusetts's U.S. senator and likely Democratic presidential nominee, John Kerry, is being criticized for boasting of foreign political endorsements he might not be able to substantiate. Hoping to paint Kerry as dishonest on this issue, Secretary of State Colin Powell even went on the Fox News Channel to demand that Kerry either “list names” of these supposed foreign supporters or “find something else to talk about.”

So Kerry is doing just that. *The Washington Times* reported on March 15, “John Kerry ... [is] arguing that voters ‘are hungry for a real discussion’” about health care, and has taken the offensive in promoting his plan, which he claims will lower costs, cover more people, and save consumers a considerable amount of money. “Americans struggling to pay health care don’t need misleading attacks; they need meaningful answers,” Kerry told a town hall meeting.

In response, the Bush team is surprisingly subdued, considering Secretary Powell’s challenge. Steve Schmidt, spokesman for the Bush reelection campaign, claims that “[John Kerry] never passed a major piece of health care legislation during his 19 years in the U.S. Senate” and that “the only thing he has done for seniors is vote for higher taxes on Social Security benefits.”

In other words, the Bush team is attacking John Kerry for not having been vigorous enough in the use of government power to interfere with the medical profession. And of course there was the casual pat-on-the-back for the president’s most-prized domestic policy achievement to date — a massive expansion of Medicare to provide prescription drug benefits to seniors.

Hoping to change his alleged poor track record on health-care legislation, John Kerry has presented a “[plan](#)” that is a hodgepodge of new government controls and regulations. Rather than leave medical decisions to individuals and their doctors, Kerry claims that “we need a national commitment to assure system-wide changes that can improve quality and reduce costs and keep health care from becoming too expensive.” If elected, he claims his program “would assure that nearly 99 percent of all children have health care coverage ... by automatically enrolling kids when they come to school.” Not yet cradle-to-grave care — but kindergarten-to-grave care, instead.

Kerry would also like to expand coverage for “the nearly seven million working parents whose children are already eligible for state-based health care,” as well as the “approximately six million adults who are uninsured and live below poverty” and eventually “cover single adults and childless couples at or below the poverty level.” John Kerry also boasts that he has “consistently supported” providing “fiscal relief” to states that are having trouble providing health-care coverage to their residents, an inadvertent admission that the kind of government health-care programs he wants at the federal level are already failing at the state level.

One of John Kerry’s gripes is that health-care coverage for most workers is directly linked to their employers. He has been listening quite sympathetically to the plight of unemployed people who have lost their coverage when they lost their job. But this is an unsurprising and unavoidable result of government’s mandating that employers provide health-care coverage to their employees! Does Kerry want to change this? On the contrary, his “plan” would offer “refundable tax credits for up to 50 percent of the cost of coverage ... to small businesses and their employees,” thereby bringing *even more* businesses under the present regime. He also wants to offer individuals and large businesses the opportunity of buying into the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program.

Kerry would have us believe that he is the goose that lays golden health-care eggs — all at the low, low price of \$72 billion a year, paid for, no doubt, by repealing those “tax cuts for the wealthy” passed by President Bush and criticized (rightly) by Democrats for adding to the federal deficit.

President Bush, for his part, isn’t proposing a rollback of legislation affecting the medical industry. His beloved prescription drug plan tells us all we need to know about his views on the relationship between government and medicine. Meanwhile, the real solution — getting government out of the health-care business and leaving all such questions to be settled in the only way appropriate to a free country, by individual persons in a free-market environment — is lost in the shuffle of grandstanding politicians shamelessly bent on out-doing each other to garner approval.

It would seem, then, that voters are being asked to choose between one form of fascist control of health care or another. Either way, government remains largely in charge, while the cost of health care will continue to soar, medical advances will decline, doctors will be continually overburdened by bureaucratic hassles, patients will become more impatient with long waits and substandard care, and politicians will continue to propose — with a straight face — that a little more government control is all that’s needed to realize the utopian dream of health care for everyone.

*Scott McPherson is a policy advisor at The Future of Freedom Foundation.*