



**GUBERNATORIAL CANDIDATES QUESTIONNAIRE ON HEALTH CARE REFORM
CANDIDATE RESPONSES
OCTOBER 2008
(ANSWERS IN BOLD BELOW)**

Governor Jim Douglas

Governor Douglas was the only candidate who would not commit to participating in a candidates' debate on health care reform, despite several attempts on the part of advocates to accommodate his schedule. Additionally, although the Douglas Campaign had previously agreed to complete this questionnaire, a campaign staff member later informed VPIRG that the Governor would not be answering our questions. No explanation was provided.

Anthony Pollina, Independent Candidate for Governor

1) What is your health care reform agenda for 2009-2010? Please list your top three priorities and briefly explain your vision for reaching each.

A Vermont Self-Insurance Plan, affordable health care for every Vermonter regardless of health and regardless of where or whether they work. Thirty cents of every dollar we now spend on health care goes to bureaucracy and insurance company profits, the Vermont Self Insurance Plan would eliminate the waste, save money and let us start controlling costs and fairly reimbursing practitioners. As Governor I would organize a statewide effort to do this, meeting with citizens, providers, hospital administrators and others.

2) Vermont's Health Care Affordability Act of 2006 set a goal of ensuring that 96% of Vermonters would have health care coverage by 2010. Do you believe that the state will be able to meet this goal?

No.

- If you believe that the goal will be achieved, then approximately 30,000 more Vermonters will have to get health insurance by the end of 2009. What specific steps will you take as governor to make this happen?
- If you do not believe the goal will be met, who bears the responsibility and why?

Governor, legislature and citizens. Governor and legislature for lack of leadership, citizens for not standing up to the lack of leadership. The only thing standing in the way of real health care reform in Vermont is political will.

3) Do you support eliminating Catamount Health's pre-existing condition exclusion clause? Please explain why or why not.

Yes, I do not believe in pre-existing condition exclusions, but I generally do not support the Catamount approach. I support a Vermont Self Insurance Plan providing affordable health care for every Vermonter regardless of health and regardless of where or whether they work.

4) Currently, over half of the 65,000 uninsured Vermonters are eligible for one of the state's health care plans. Public outreach has found that the number one reason why Vermonters do not enroll in Catamount Health, Dr. Dynasaur, and VHAP is the high cost of premiums. As governor, would you commit to lowering these premiums so no one would have to pay more than 10% of their net income towards health care?

Yes, I support this goal as part of a Vermont Self Insurance Plan providing affordable health care for every Vermonter regardless of health and regardless of where or whether they work.

5) What other steps can the state take to provide relief to Vermont's "underinsured" population?

The State should include all citizens in a Vermont Self Insurance Plan providing affordable health care for every Vermonter regardless of health and where or whether they work. There would be no uninsured or underinsured, everyone would have access to the same health care.

6) Tobacco represents almost \$200 million in health care costs every year, and is a significant driver of Medicaid costs as well. At the same time, most state policy-makers have stressed the importance of long-term prevention and lowering health care costs.

- o Why isn't Vermont funding its tobacco programs to the levels recommended by the CDC?

I presume the Governor and Legislature chose not to. Not a priority for them.

- o Do you support Vermont's track record of taking money from the tobacco trust fund to fund other programs?

No.

- o As Governor in the next term, what steps would you take to ensure tobacco prevention is taken more seriously?

Work with advocates, health practitioners and others to elevate the issue and work for adequate funding.

7) Five years ago, the legislature received recommendations concerning necessary programs and steps to address stroke care and prevention in Vermont. These recommendations were laid out in a report to the legislature, yet almost none of these steps have been completed because Vermont does not offer any funding to improve stroke awareness and care. As governor in the next term, what would you do to ensure adequate attention and funding is in place to address the #3 cause of death and the #1 cause of long-term disability?

Five years is a long time to ignore a problem after the report is in. I presume programs to meet this need would pay for themselves in prevention and lower, long-term costs, not to mention human suffering. I also presume they would be part of a comprehensive health

care program like the Vermont Self Insurance Plan. Otherwise I would work to see they are recognized and funded.

8) One in four school-aged children in Vermont is overweight or obese. Despite all of the piecemeal or seasonal initiatives offered across the state, the one place where kids spend the majority of their time – school – does not provide adequate physical education for kids. Vermont does not meet national recommendations for quality physical education to teach kids lifelong skills for being physically fit. Again, in thinking about the impact of obesity on the cost of health care and long-term prevention of chronic disease, as governor, would you commit to ensuring that our youth have access to the recommended physical education that will teach them lifelong skills to be healthy and fit and reduce long-term chronic disease?

Yes. Your reference to piecemeal initiatives is important. Our whole approach to health care is piecemeal, a patchwork of programs that leave many without adequate care and result in unnecessary bureaucracy and waste.

9) Do you believe that access to quality, affordable health care ought to be a right of citizenship?

Absolutely. I believe it would have been very useful to Vermonters to have candidates debate these important issues face to face.

Gaye Symington, Democratic Candidate for Governor

1) What is your health care reform agenda for 2009-2010? Please list your top three priorities and briefly explain your vision for reaching each.

All Vermonters should have the health care they need, when they need it, at a price they can afford. To accomplish this vision, I will:

- **Turn our system around so that we are focused on keeping people healthy instead of only treating them when they are sick**
- **Control costs by reducing inefficiencies, reducing waste, and improving care**
- **Reduce hassles by making it simpler for Vermonters to get the care they need and pay their bills**

2) Vermont's Health Care Affordability Act of 2006 set a goal of ensuring that 96% of Vermonters would have health care coverage by 2010. Do you believe that the state will be able to meet this goal?

It will be a challenge to meet the goal of 96% coverage by 2010. We set a tough goal in 2006 because it was the right thing to do and I remain committed to reaching the goal. We have made a good start with almost 11,000 previously uninsured Vermonters enrolled, but we may need to take additional steps.

- If you believe that the goal will be achieved, then approximately 30,000 more Vermonters will have to get health insurance by the end of 2009. What specific steps will you take as governor to make this happen?

As Governor, I will insist on a full investigation into the reasons people are and aren't enrolling in health care coverage. The specific steps I would take will depend on what's working and what's not, but I would at least:

- **Look for additional ways to encourage people to enroll who already qualify for Medicaid, VHAP, and Dr. Dynasaur**

- **Work with new leaders in Washington, which I hope and presume will be Barack Obama, to bring additional funding and flexibility to make Vermont's programs even more affordable**
 - **Evaluate Massachusetts' experience with insurance purchasing requirements and consider whether we need that in Vermont**
- If you do not believe the goal will be met, who bears the responsibility and why?

I am interested in reaching the goal and fixing what we can to get people the health care they need, when they need it, at a price they can afford. I'm much less interested in placing blame.

3) Do you support eliminating Catamount Health's pre-existing condition exclusion clause? Please explain why or why not.

Yes, I support eliminating the pre-existing conditions exclusion if we can find the money to do so. The reason we are in this mess to begin with is because of Jim Douglas' insistence on using the private insurance market for Catamount Health.

4) Currently, over half of the 65,000 uninsured Vermonters are eligible for one of the state's health care plans. Public outreach has found that the number one reason why Vermonters do not enroll in Catamount Health, Dr. Dynasaur, and VHAP is the high cost of premiums. As governor, would you commit to lowering these premiums so no one would have to pay more than 10% of their net income towards health care?

A vast majority of people who qualify for state health care plans and premium subsidies already pay less than 10% of their income. I am committed to affordable health care for all Vermonters, so am willing to consider a variety of options to control costs and increase affordability. Under my leadership, Medicaid premiums were cut in half and Jim Douglas' proposal last year to double Medicaid premiums and re-institute co-pays on prescriptions was rejected. I understand the importance of making health care affordable.

5) What other steps can the state take to provide relief to Vermont's "underinsured" population?

Underinsured Vermonters typically face ever increasing deductibles and co-pays. The problem with this is that care often gets deferred until people get very sick. This is bad for health and inevitably adds avoidable costs to the health care system. As we have done in Catamount Health, I would look to make preventive care and primary care for more and more Vermonters with chronic diseases not subject to deductibles and co-pays.

6) Tobacco represents almost \$200 million in health care costs every year, and is a significant driver of Medicaid costs as well. At the same time, most state policy-makers have stressed the importance of long-term prevention and lowering health care costs.

- Why isn't Vermont funding its tobacco programs to the levels recommended by the CDC?

Vermont has used tobacco settlement funds to provide health care to Vermonters and to support tobacco cessation programs. Our use of tobacco funds reflects our commitment to both of these important goals.

- Do you support Vermont's track record of taking money from the tobacco trust fund to fund other programs?

I am proud of the work that Vermont has done to ensure health care to so many of its citizens and to invest in efforts that prevent disease and reduce health care costs. There is more that we need to do though. I did strongly oppose Jim Douglas' efforts to take over

\$100 million in tobacco funds to pay for things other than health care and tobacco programs.

- As Governor in the next term, what steps would you take to ensure tobacco prevention is taken more seriously?

I take tobacco prevention very seriously and my administration will reflect this value. Tobacco prevention, like other efforts to keep Vermonters healthy and reduce health care costs are essential to my goal of ensuring that all Vermonters should have the health care they need, when they need it, at a price they can afford. At the same time, I need to be honest with Vermonters about the financial challenges our state is facing.

7) Five years ago, the legislature received recommendations concerning necessary programs and steps to address stroke care and prevention in Vermont. These recommendations were laid out in a report to the legislature, yet almost none of these steps have been completed because Vermont does not offer any funding to improve stroke awareness and care. As governor in the next term, what would you do to ensure adequate attention and funding is in place to address the #3 cause of death and the #1 cause of long-term disability?

Addressing stroke prevention and care fits in with my overall health care plan, which focuses on keeping people healthy and getting them the care they need when they need it. Cardiovascular disease and its associated risk factors (e.g., hypertension, high cholesterol, tobacco use, physical inactivity, and poor nutrition) are important parts of Vermont's chronic care management program. As governor, I will accelerate both prevention and chronic care management initiatives.

8) One in four school-aged children in Vermont is overweight or obese. Despite all of the piece-meal or seasonal initiatives offered across the state, the one place where kids spend the majority of their time – school – does not provide adequate physical education for kids. Vermont does not meet national recommendations for quality physical education to teach kids lifelong skills for being physically fit. Again, in thinking about the impact of obesity on the cost of health care and long-term prevention of chronic disease, as governor, would you commit to ensuring that our youth have access to the recommended physical education that will teach them lifelong skills to be healthy and fit and reduce long-term chronic disease?

We need to turn our health care system around so that we are focused on keeping people healthy instead of only treating them when they are sick. I support a comprehensive approach to helping our children stay healthy and physically fit. This should include wellness programs and incentives for families and their doctors, health and physical education classes in our schools, and recreation opportunities in our communities.

9) Do you believe that access to quality, affordable health care ought to be a right of citizenship?

I believe all Vermonters should have the health care they need, when they need it, at a price they can afford. From both a moral and financial point of view, this is the right thing to do.