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Candidates Confuse the Health Care Issue

By Marvin Mantyk and Evan Mantyk, 5/7/08, The [Epoch Times](#) (an independent voice in [print](#) and on the web)

NEW YORK—Last week was Cover the Uninsured Week 2008—just ask any of the three leading presidential candidates, they know all about it. For them and other politicians, the **race to get America's 44 million uninsured covered has focused on just that, coverage, and largely ignored two other crucial and arguably more important aspects to national health care: quality and price.**

"My plan begins by covering every American," reads a quote from Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama on his Web site. "Hillary's American Health Choices Plan covers all Americans," begins Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton's Website page on health care. Presumptive Republican nominee John McCain has given his own version of the same line. "Health care should be available to all and not limited by where you work or how much you make," reads his Web site.

What you won't hear is that Americans already have universal [health coverage](#) of a sort. If you are facing life-threatening conditions, people can simply go to the emergency room. And it doesn't have to just be life-threatening. Giving birth? Broke an arm? Need stitches from a bad cut? Have a debilitating headache? All these can get treatment at the emergency room. Reliance on an emergency room is certainly not ideal, but for many currently uninsured people, having to pay for expensive [health insurance](#) may only provide them with a marginal increase in benefit coverage. This is because insurance often brings with it high co-pays and deductibles.

The real question is one of quality and cost—how to spend taxpayers' money in a productive way and make America a healthier nation in the long run. As an example, should money be spent on very expensive neonatal intensive care units, or on correcting the conditions that result in premature births that typically end up in neonatal intensive care units? This a real question facing the industry.

A more general question to ask is, who are the principal beneficiaries of universal coverage as defined by the presidential candidates? [Insurance companies](#) are the ones.

Any real answers for America's health care will need to look beyond a universal coverage band-aid and solve underlying issues, **focusing more on research and education**—which

are currently treated as secondary components—and look at the **overall structure of the health care system**. Something to think about: In 10 years we are expected to have an acute shortage of doctors. Adding 44 million of the currently uninsured to the insured queue without addressing this shortfall will result in everyone having less access.

But unfortunately, the rhetoric continues. Alongside the universal coverage rhetoric, another common line in candidates' talk about health care is the preservation of choice—as if this is any help. "If you have a plan you like, you keep it. If you want to change plans or aren't currently covered, you can choose from dozens of the same plans available to members of Congress, or you can opt into a public plan option like Medicare," says Clinton. "Families should be in charge of their health care dollars and have more control over care," says McCain. "If you want more choices, you will also have the option of purchasing a number of affordable private plans that have similar benefits and standards for quality and efficiency," says Obama.

It used to be that the issue of choice had to do with choosing your personal physician, not an [insurance plan](#). The candidates are saying never mind the quality of the insurance itself or if it's raising—directly or indirectly through subsidization—taxes and accumulating further national debt. They are content with the idea that Americans will all have coverage and will be able to choose their insurer. The really important decisions that concern patients are not which insurance company is paying their bills but the decisions that a physician is making regarding their health care.