



*A Union of Professionals*

## 2008 U.S. Presidential Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Senator John Edwards

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**Today, more than 46 million students attend our nation's public schools. The teachers, paraprofessionals and other school employees who work with these students each day care deeply about the quality of our public schools and the education their students receive.**

**1. What do you believe are the opportunities and challenges facing public education, and how would your administration deal with each?**

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.

**2. What policies would you support to help close the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students?**

We all pay a price when young people who could someday find the cure for AIDS or make a fuel cell work are sitting on a stoop because they didn't get the education they need. Our education system needs fundamental change.

We need to invest much more to close achievement gaps and ensure that every child has a fair opportunity to learn. I support legislation that would close the achievement gaps by recruiting excellent teachers and giving them more professional support, reducing class size, and promoting parental involvement.

I strongly support substantial increases in funding for Title I, the primary source of federal resources to remedy inequalities and improve the education of disadvantaged children. It helps provide low-income children with more individualized instruction and improved teaching and learning.

**3. What is your view of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)? What changes, if any, would you make to the law and why? What provisions would you retain and why?**

High standards and accountability for results can help us strengthen our schools. We need education policies that will ensure that all children have an opportunity to learn. However, much of the No Child Left Behind Act needs to be improved.

The accountability provisions of No Child Left Behind are often illogical and arbitrary, and they can have damaging effects in the classroom. It's a mistake to think we can measure the success of our schools by testing alone. When we talk about what makes a school successful, we need to consider more than test scores.

Rather than punishing schools it calls “failing,” the law should develop smarter strategies to lift up struggling schools. It should also invest much more in recruiting and rewarding teachers, the most important factor in students' achievement, and other school professionals. I would involve teachers and school professionals in developing the best possible recruitment and retention plan.

We also need to measure progress more precisely. No Child Left Behind rules compare this year's students against last year's students, instead of measuring progress. It's not fair or accurate to call a school that makes great strides

helping struggling children, but falls just short of the threshold, an unqualified failure. My own state, North Carolina, has long successfully measured students' learning by examining their growth over time.

A great education and great schools start with a great teacher. In fact, a good teacher is the single most important in-school factor in improving student achievement. We need to review the "highly qualified" teacher requirements because it is excluding good teachers without ensuring teacher effectiveness.

We should also take a hard look at the supplemental educational services provisions that have proven to be a bonanza for for-profit private sector firms. These firms need to be held accountable for their performance. In addition, school districts should have greater flexibility to provide these services themselves with qualified teachers.

#### **4. What role do you think early-childhood education should play in the overall approach to children's education?**

Early-childhood education plays a crucial role in children's education, preparing them for K-12 and developing social skills. The payoff is big. Young people who were enrolled in preschool programs are more likely to graduate from high school, own homes, and earn more as adults.

As a one-time member of the board of the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at UNC, one of the oldest research centers devoted to this subject, I have a deep interest and commitment to early-childhood education. We need to expand preschool for three- and four-year-olds. I've supported expanding Head Start and Early Head Start, Child Care Development Block Grants, and Title I.

We also need to invest in recruiting and training more teachers in early childhood education. This has been proven to increase quality and compensation while decreasing turnover.

#### **5. A growing number of students leave college with overwhelming debt from student loans. This burden, coupled with escalating tuition and fees, makes access to higher education increasingly difficult for many students and their families. What is the role of the federal government in ensuring that higher education is affordable and accessible?**

In America, every child should be able to go as far as his God-given talents and hard work will take him. As the first in my family to go to college, I know that our system of higher education should be our sturdiest ladder of opportunity.

I have released a plan to make college more affordable and reduce student debt called College for Everyone. It will pay 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.

Research has shown that reducing the price of college can increase college enrollment rates, particularly in the first year of college. Unlike existing student aid programs, which give more money to schools with higher tuition, College for Everyone will encourage states and colleges to keep tuition low. State budget cuts are the number-one driver of higher tuition. College for Everyone's universal eligibility for qualifying students would break through the noise of the current student aid system and send a strong message that all qualified students can afford college.

In the fall of 2005, I helped start a College for Everyone pilot program at Greene Central High School in Snow Hill, North Carolina. More than 125 students from this year's graduating class are expected to go to college in the fall with the help of College for Everyone. The projected college-going rate for Greene Central seniors has increased from 54 percent before the program started to 74 percent today.

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.

**6. What actions do you think the federal government should take to support the renovation and modernization of our nation's public school buildings?**

After years of neglect, America's schools are in serious disrepair. Too many children attend schools with leaky roofs, poor ventilation, and buildings that don't meet fire codes. One-third of school facilities need extensive repair or complete replacement.

Our schools should be safe, modern facilities equipped to use modern technology and support smaller class sizes. I support federal resources to rebuild our schools and modernize them to allow smaller class sizes and the use of the latest educational technology.

#### **7. What are your views on the privatizing and contracting out of public services, including private school vouchers?**

I strongly oppose private school vouchers. Vouchers are a dangerous effort to drain resources from public schools, while doing nothing to help the vast majority of students who will never enroll in private schools. It's not surprising that the voucher program in Washington, D.C.—which has now been operating for a year—has been shown not to increase student achievement. Our first priority should be to strengthen the schools that teach the vast majority of our children.

Millions of public servants work hard every day to improve our country, often accepting only modest compensation. We need to restore a sense of pride in public services. While the federal government offers awards for outstanding federal employees, I would also invite outstanding state and local employees recognized by their employers to the White House to honor them for their contributions.

In some states, the quality of federally-funded services has suffered after they were outsourced to private contractors. States seeking to outsource services should be required to demonstrate that they have given public employees a fair opportunity to demonstrate that they can do the job better.

We need to hold contractors to the same high standards as we do government workers.

**Healthcare is an issue that touches all of our lives. Today, 46 million Americans—including more than 8 million children—have no health insurance. Increasingly, employers are less likely and less willing to provide healthcare coverage for their employees and retirees. Older Americans are paying a larger percentage of their income for healthcare than they did before Medicare was created. And healthcare workers are feeling increasingly overworked and insufficiently supported.**

**8. As president, what would you do to control skyrocketing healthcare costs while ensuring that all Americans—especially children and the elderly—have access to high-quality healthcare?**

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. Finally, once these steps have been taken, all American residents will be required to take responsibility and get insurance.

Under my plan, families without insurance will get coverage at an affordable price. Families that have insurance today—who sometimes have trouble paying their share of health insurance payments—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.

America spends more per person on health care than anywhere else in the world, but the results of all that spending are often disappointing. 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 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.

I will cut the cost of and improve treatment for chronic conditions—which account for three-quarters of national health care spending—by requiring health care plans to proactively monitor the health of patients with chronic ailments, reducing complications and hospitalizations. Thirty cents of every dollar spent on health care goes toward administration and system waste. My plan requires insurers to spend at least 85 percent of their premiums on patient care.

Nearly one-third of patients experience medical mistakes, medication errors, or lab problems. Overall, better, more consistent quality could save 100,000 to 150,000 lives and \$50 billion to \$100 billion a year. I will require health care providers to use information technology that protects privacy, bring the private sector together to establish standards, and provide targeted help with implementation.

The Medicare prescription drug benefit is needlessly expensive due to giveaways to drug companies. When I am president, I will rewrite this drug bill to put 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.

**9. Many licensed healthcare professionals, particularly RNs, are leaving hospital service because of difficult working conditions, including excessive and unsafe workloads, understaffing and mandatory overtime. What would you do to address these problems and to improve recruitment and retention of nurses and other healthcare professionals?**

Educating and training the next generation of health care workers is essential to meet the increased demand of a universal health care system. The need is particularly acute for nursing—the backbone of the health care system—where we are already experiencing a shortage. By the year 2020, America will be short 340,000 registered nurses.

The result of the nursing shortage will be millions of Americans paying more and getting less from their health care. Many hospitals have responded to the nursing shortage by increasing the number of patients that each nurse is responsible for and forcing nurses to work overtime. This has resulted in nurses leaving the profession at a higher rate. Nearly 500,000 registered nurses are not working as nurses today, deterred by low pay, long hours, unsafe workplaces, and a lack of respect.

Hiring more nurses could save 6,700 lives and 4 million days of hospital care every year, while dramatically reducing adverse outcomes like hospital-acquired pneumonia and cardiac arrest. Patients undergoing routine surgeries in American hospitals are at a 31 percent greater risk of dying if they are treated in a hospital with a severe nursing shortage.

I have a plan to attract 100,000 nurses, bringing 50,000 back to the profession, and recruiting an additional 50,000. I will improve workplace conditions for nurses through federal challenge grants to support “magnet hospitals” with better work environments, training nurses to take on new and more challenging roles, mentoring young nurses, and giving nurses a voice in hospital administration.

I will also improve workplace safety through collaborative efforts led by the Department of Health and Human Services and eliminate mandatory overtime for nurses. I co-sponsored legislation to eliminate mandatory overtime when I served in the Senate.

Despite the nursing shortage, there are too few seats at nursing schools. Nearly 150,000 qualified applicants were turned away from nursing schools in 2005. To

recruit 50,000 additional nurses, I support nursing schools by encouraging partnerships between these schools and hospitals to increase the seats at nursing schools by 30 percent over five years. I will also help pay tuition for nursing students who agree to serve where they are needed most, such as rural hospitals and urban public hospitals.

I believe that we also need rules to assure appropriate staffing levels. It is nurses themselves who understand what is required by the job and they must be involved in developing safe staffing systems. Safe staffing levels should be determined on a unit-by-unit level, taking several factors into account including the intensity of patient care needed, support staff, available technology and the experience of the nursing staff. In the Senate, I co-sponsored legislation mandating safe staffing ratios for nursing homes.

**10. We've recently seen several initiatives designed to move health insurance coverage away from an employer-based model. Do you agree with that direction? If so, what would you propose as an alternative to the current system for covering working adults?**

Businesses have a responsibility to help promote the good health of their workers. My plan is based on the principle of shared responsibility and includes meaningful contributions from employers. Under my plan, businesses will either cover their employees or help pay their premiums. Employers who choose not to offer insurance would pay a fee equal to up to 6 percent of payroll.

I will also establish Health Care Markets to create options for individuals who do not get insurance from their work, as well as businesses who wish to reduce their administrative costs.

The federal government will help states and groups of states create regional Health Markets—non-profit purchasing pools that offer a choice of competing insurance plans. At least one plan would be a public program based upon Medicare. All plans will include comprehensive benefits, including full mental health benefits. Families and businesses could choose to supplement their coverage with additional benefits. The markets will be available to everyone who does not get comparable insurance from their jobs or a public program and to employers that choose to join rather than offer their own insurance plans.

I strongly reject alternative so-called “consumer-driven” solutions offered by the proponents of an “Ownership Society” that unfairly ask individuals to bear more risk in the form of high-deductible policies and health savings accounts.

An administration's economic policy has far-reaching implications for the United States and the world. It also says a great deal about a president's priorities and general philosophy regarding how the federal government should relate to its citizens.

**11. What are your priorities for the economy? How would your economic plan help restore funding for education, healthcare, transportation, public safety and many other services provided to our citizens?**

Four years ago I talked about how we live in Two Americas, and I still believe that there are Two Americas. Today, the top 300,000 Americans make more than the bottom 150 million put together. Men in their 30s today earn less in real dollars than men did 30 years ago. More and more women have gone to work, and now married couples with children are working an average of 10 hours a week more than their parents did. What does all this mean in real terms? It means that our economy is structured to make it harder for regular families to get ahead.

I have learned something in the last four years, though. It's not enough to talk about the Two Americas. We also need to talk about what we need to do to build One America—and to do that, I believe we have to build one American economy.

We must restore our values to the economy by rewarding those low-income and middle-class Americans who earn a paycheck every week. I will reform the tax code to help working families, make it fairer, and reverse the war on work by making sure families at the top pay their fair share. I will protect workers by making sure trade works for them, not just for corporations, and by making it easier for workers to join unions.

Improving education, health care, and building a new energy economy will all require real investments. I have been very specific about how I'm going to pay for them: Roll back Bush's tax cuts for people making more than \$200,000 a year, collect the tens of billions of dollars in unpaid taxes, and cut wasteful spending such as the subsidies for private lenders in the college loan program.

**12. As president, what would you do to: (a) prevent employers from intimidating and harassing workers who support union representation, (b) ensure that workers are free to organize and bargain in the workplace and (c) protect the rights of American workers?**

Organized labor has been the most important anti-poverty movement in American history, strengthening the middle class and providing good-paying jobs for millions of Americans. Unions have fought for and improved the lives of every working man and woman by giving them a voice. I know—my mother

and my brother have both benefited from their membership in unions. We need stronger unions in this country, and we need a national effort to get them.

Over the last few years, I have helped working families all around the country. I have helped more than 20 national unions organize thousands of workers. I have participated in more than 170 labor activities and organizing drives since 2004. Walking picket lines, calling and writing to employers, and meeting with workers behind closed doors, I have seen firsthand what unions go through every day trying to protect the right to organize, bargain collectively, and get decent wages and benefits.

I am a proud supporter of the Employee Free Choice Act. Illegal employer efforts to block union drives have unfortunately become commonplace. To level the playing field, we need to make it easier for workers to organize themselves into unions. If a Republican can join the Republican Party by signing their name to a card, any worker in America ought to be able to join a union by doing exactly the same thing. Making the Employee Free Choice Act the law of the land will be a top priority when I am president.

In order to ensure that unions can bargain fairly, I also support banning the use of permanent replacements for striking workers. To make sure the rights of workers are protected, I will appoint members of the National Labor Relations Board who are committed to protecting the right to organize and bargain collectively, as those rights are protected in the National Labor Relations Act.

**13. What would your administration do to extend pension coverage to all employees and to guarantee that both private and public employees' hard-earned pensions are protected?**

For a century, defined benefit pension plans have allowed workers, particularly unionized workers, to retire with security and dignity. Too often, however, employers have not kept their promises to workers. I support steps to strengthen defined benefit pensions.

Employees who have worked hard all their lives should not be denied the pension benefits they have earned. While younger workers may like the mobility of cash-balance plans, these pensions can penalize older workers. We cannot allow companies to switch out of defined-benefit plans in order to deny long-term workers their pensions. 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.

**14. What is your strategy for sustaining and strengthening Social Security and Medicare?**

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 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.

Social Security is one of the most successful government programs in history. It lifts 13 million senior citizens out of poverty every year. I am committed to protecting retirement benefits for working Americans. 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. One option is an additional tax on workers with very high incomes.

**Labor unions have played and continue to play an important role in the social and economic health of our country. AFT members are interested in knowing your views on the role of labor unions.**

**15. As president, what would you do to remedy the National Labor Relations Board’s October 2006 ruling in the Kentucky River cases that greatly expands the definition of “supervisor” and threatens to deny the right of workers to union protection and impede their ability to advocate for quality services without fear of reprisal?**

The Kentucky River cases exclude up to 8 million Americans from the protection of joining a union. The National Labor Relations Board wrongly determined that workers who commonly perform the same work as their co-workers, except that, as skilled and experienced workers, they may give instructions and guidance to those with lesser skills and experience, somehow qualify as management. These cases highlight the importance of electing a president who believes in the importance of unions to protecting and expanding the middle class.

As president, I will nominate Americans to the NLRB who are committed to protecting the collective bargaining rights of working families and judges who will read our labor laws as they were intended. I believe the decisions in the Kentucky River cases should be reversed by NLRB members who are committed to protecting working Americans. If necessary, I will pass legislation reversing NLRB decisions that misinterpret the National Labor Relations Act and deny workers the opportunity to join unions.

**16. What role do you think unions should play in shaping the economy? In government? In education? In healthcare?**

Organized labor has been the most important anti-poverty movement in American history, strengthening the middle class and providing good-paying jobs for millions of Americans. Unions have fought for and made better the lives of every working man and woman, by giving them a voice – labor never stands silent where wrongs need to be righted.

I believe dialogue between policymakers and labor unions is essential to ensuring the voices of working families are heard in all facets of policy—from how we strengthen our schools and the way we pay for and deliver health care, to the manner we relate to the rest of the world.

**17. More than 8 million public employees in 25 states currently have no OSHA protection or entitlement to a safe and healthful workplace. Do you support universal OSHA coverage for all public employees?**

Yes. I support universal OSHA coverage for all public employees. Every public worker should be provided with a safe and healthy workplace. I co-sponsored the Protecting America’s Workers Act when I served in the Senate to ensure that

every American worker is protected by federally-approved safety and health standards in the workplace. As president, I will make it law.

I believe that we must strengthen OSHA and protect workplace safety laws. These laws safeguard millions of workers from hazardous work conditions and have prevented untold numbers of workplace accidents and fatalities. I would reverse George Bush's budget cuts to OSHA, an already overtaxed agency, and give it the additional resources it needs to do its job.

I strongly opposed the Bush Administration's abandonment of real ergonomics standards, and I fought against the nomination of the anti-worker Eugene Scalia to be Solicitor of the Labor Department. As president, I will implement real ergonomics standards, and appoint officials who are committed to enforcing those standards.

It is critical that OSHA aggressively enforce the laws on the books. Whenever a worker's death is caused by a willful violation of safety laws, I will require OSHA to refer cases to the Department of Justice for potential prosecution. I will also increase the punishment for worker deaths from six months in jail to up to 10 years and require employers to fix urgent safety issues while they are appealing fines. We should strengthen protections for workers who report injuries or unsafe conditions, including an expedited process for hearing complaints of retaliation.

As president, I would issue a broad safety and health standard requiring employers to establish programs to systemically find and fix hazards. We must also do more to address ergonomic hazards, protect workers against chemical reactions and address nursing home conditions to prevent workplace injuries there.

**18. It is the public policy of the federal government to encourage and promote collective bargaining through the National Labor Relations Act, as set forth in the act's preamble. Thirty-two states have policies that apply similar principles to their public employees. What would your administration do to guarantee these same rights to public employees in the other states?**

I strongly support the right of public employees to organize. Consistent with the mission of the National Labor Relations Act and its limits, there is a lot we can do to extend the benefits of collective bargaining in every state of this country.

I have publicly supported state legislation in New Hampshire and Oregon to enable public employees to join a union through card-check elections.

I have also supported "fair share" legislation in Iowa that would enable public sector unions to include fair share clauses in their collective bargaining

agreements. This would enable unions to be compensated for the contract-negotiation services they provide to both union and non-union workers who benefit from collective bargaining agreements.

I support the Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act, which would take an important step forward by guaranteeing that state and local public safety officers enjoy the right to organize and bargain collectively.

To make collective bargaining for public employees a reality in all 50 states, we need to elect pro-worker governors and legislators at the state level who will defend the rights of public employees to organize. We need a candidate at the top of the ticket who will help down-ballot candidates everywhere, run strong everywhere again—including in the South—if we want to strengthen the labor movement in this country.

**In survey after survey, Americans identify the war in Iraq as one of the issues with which they are most concerned.**

**19. What is your proposal for dealing with the conflict in Iraq?**

There is no military solution to the problem in Iraq; we need to have a political solution. All of the parties in Iraq need to take responsibility for the future of their country, and that will only happen when they realize that American troops are really leaving. I have proposed a plan to immediately withdraw 40,000 to 50,000 combat troops and bring home the rest within about a year.

We need to intensify U.S. efforts to train the Iraqi security forces. We need to step up U.S. diplomatic efforts by engaging in direct talks, including a peace conference, with all the nations in the region, including Iran and Syria, to bring a political solution to the sectarian violence inside Iraq.

As we withdraw our combat troops from Iraq, we will most likely need to retain some troops in the region in order to prevent genocide and violence that crosses Iraq's borders.

**In Conclusion**

**20. What do you think this nation's priorities should be during the next decade? How would your presidency advance those priorities?**

Two Americas still exist in our country. One America that lives by the paycheck calendar; another that never has to look at the calendar before writing a check. One America that's afraid it won't be able to leave its children a better life;

another whose children are already set for life. One America—middle-class America—long forgotten by Washington; and another America—narrow-interest America—whose every wish is Washington’s command.

Today, American families are working harder and harder while the rewards go to someone else. Wages have fallen in recent years even as the economy has grown. In America today, the top 1 percent of Americans have 19 percent of the income, more than twice what it was a generation ago. At the same time, the costs of necessities like health care, child care, and education have grown.

But it’s not enough to talk about the Two Americas. We also need to talk about what we need to do to build One America—and to do that, I believe we have to build One American Economy.

To build One American Economy, our policies must guarantee quality affordable health care for every American by 2012, address energy independence, restore tax fairness, fight predatory lending, help families save for the future, and reward work.

Every day, 37 million Americans wake in poverty. Our response to that reality says everything about the character of America. I believe we can cut poverty in half within a decade and eliminate it within a generation. My plan to eliminate poverty is based on creating and rewarding work, strengthening families, helping workers save and get ahead, transforming our schools, breaking up areas of concentrated poverty, and expecting people to help themselves by working whenever they are able. We simply cannot end poverty without a serious, sustained effort to turn around struggling schools.

To address the crisis of global warming, 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.

Our standing in the world has been badly tarnished in recent years. America must once again be looked up to and respected around the world. Beyond ending the war in Iraq, we must also lead on the great challenges like ending the genocide in Darfur and the conflict in Uganda and fighting global poverty and diseases like AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis. A strong, principled national security policy is the foundation of America’s strength. We must stand by our soldiers at every turn, while respecting the Constitution and living up to our ideals in the fight against terrorism.