



**COGNITIVE
POLICY
WORKS**

Health Care for All Ohioans

Discussion Brief on Strategic Framing

August 10, 2009

Overview ¹

This strategy brief is intended for advocates in Ohio seeking to promote universal health care. Our hope is that the following recommendations and analysis empower citizen activists and civic organizations to drive progressive reform around health care concerns in Ohio.

The emphasis will be placed on *cognitive frames*² that shape how health care issues are thought about. It is important to note that frames are the mental structures activated in our brains every time we think about the world. They give form to the concepts and ideas that underly political language and thought.

The scope of this analysis is to assess the frame elements of communication materials provided by Chuck Watts, Elected Precinct Representative for the Union North Precinct of the Democratic Party of Clinton County Ohio. These materials are included in the appendix at the end of this brief.

One of these materials is the following vision statement:

Human dignity demands health care that:

- 1. Strengthens all Americans;**
- 2. Strengthens cooperation between all patients, all health care providers and government at all levels; and**
- 3. Is strengthened by citizens defending themselves against health care privateers responsible for 60 daily American deaths.**

¹ This report was prepared by Joe Brewer, Director of Cognitive Policy Works. Joe can be reached at brewer@cognitivepolicyworks.com.

² Learn more about frames and their role in political thought online here: <http://www.cognitivepolicyworks.com/what-we-do/thinking-points/chapter-3-part-1-frames/>

Recommendations

The following analysis reveals two approaches to persuade citizens about health care issues:

1. Appeal to Economic Self-Interest
2. Appeal to Caring for Others

The current strategy involves a call for making America stronger. It is supported by facts that show how much money would be saved by Clinton County if Ohio adopted the Ohio Health Care Plan - HB 159. This is a direct appeal to economic self-interest in the form of:

The Ohio Health Care Plan will save you money, therefore it is the right thing to do.

This strategy is grounded in the Economic Self-Interest Frame that reinforces existing notions of private health care and undermines reform efforts. We recommend avoiding this strategy and shifting instead to an appeal of **Caring for Others**.

The **Caring for Others** approach emphasizes the human aspects of our health care system and the suffering it causes to everyday citizens. This humanizes health care and moves beyond the calculus of cost-savings (and into the realm of promoting human health). This can be summarized as:

Caring for others is the right thing to do. The Ohio Health Care Plan places people, not profits, at the heart of health care.

Rather than arguing how best to save money, you will capture the hearts of Americans by persuading them that caring for people makes our communities stronger and safer. It puts the issue in the realm of everyday life, taking it out of the hands of economic analysts and policy wonks that feel alien to the typical citizen.

Two Paths to Health Care Reform

Our analysis reveals two competing frames that shape how health care is understood. The first is the Economic Self-Interest Frame, which focuses on the rational drive to make choices that lead to desirable outcomes. This is contrasted with the Caring for Others Frame that focuses on the pro-social drive to have empathy for others and seek to minimize their suffering, based on the understanding that they are like us in fundamental ways.

Economic Self-Interest Frame

Discussions of health care that focus on economic concerns (e.g. cost savings, efficient delivery of services, getting the return on our investment, affordability, etc.) involve thinking about health care principally as an *economic issue*. This involves thinking about human beings through the paradigm of self-interest that dominates economic thinking in the world today.

The problem is understood as one of engaging the self-interested tendencies of people to “get the best deal” on health care. It suggests that the world is filled with individuals who are out for themselves.

Caring for Others Frame

Discussions of health care that focus on human suffering and the desire to be healthy (e.g. preventing disease, promoting public health, relieving pain, etc.) involve thinking about health care principally as a *compassion issue*. This involves thinking about human beings through the paradigm of human dignity that is central to human rights movements around the world.

The problem is understood as one of engaging the empathetic bonds among people to “desire health and the relief of suffering” in health care. It suggests that the world is filled with communities where people should take care of one another.

These competing frames shape different political strategies for health care reform. The first is commonly used today and does little to engage the populace in the human crises of our health care system. It presupposes ideas behind “free market” ideology that drive a pro-corporate agenda, one that dehumanizes people in many areas of society. It also fails to

evoke the idea that investing in public infrastructure leads to collective benefits, which is central to understanding public health as an issue that transcends individuals.³

The second frame promotes a sense of shared responsibility to provide basic services to all people, because each of us is worthy of care. It challenges the notions of economics that treat people like numbers on an accountant's spreadsheet. When combined with stories about individuals we know and care about (e.g. a family member or neighbor), the notion of caring for others becomes tangible, shedding light on the inadequacies of economic thinking alone.

The communication materials in the appendix demonstrate that a "cost-savings" strategy is currently being employed. This shows that the Economic Self-Interest Frame is central to the persuasion strategy of Representative Watts and his precinct constituents. At the same time, the vision statement of Representative Watts asserts that human dignity should motivate health care reform.

What this reveals is that the frames behind the current advocacy strategy conflates two frames that contradict one another. A stronger approach will separate these frames and promote one as front and center. Based on this analysis, we recommend moving away from the Appeal to Economic Self-Interest and toward an Appeal to Caring for Others.⁴

³ In the words of Eric Haas, a consulting partner at Cognitive Policy Works, "the right thing to do is also the smart thing to do" - meaning that we can care for others and bring down costs at the same time by investing in each other.

⁴ For context, we recommend reading *Don't Think of a Sick Child - The Logic of the Health Care Debate* to see how these frames fit into the national discourse around health care in the United States. This report can be downloaded here: <http://www.cognitivepolicyworks.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/logic-of-the-health-care-debate.pdf>

Appendix - Written Materials for Frame Analysis

The following excerpts are taken from the precinct representative's website.⁵ They provide the "data" for performing frame analysis on health care strategies of Representative Watts and his precinct constituents.

Excerpt 1: Vision Statement

Stronger America Service Area - How do we strengthen Americans, world diplomacy and defense of America's promise to protect and empower one another? Where are we today?

Human dignity demands health care that:

1. Strengthens all Americans;
2. Strengthens cooperation between all patients, all health care providers and government at all levels; and
3. Is strengthened by citizens defending themselves against health care privateers responsible for 60 daily American deaths.

Excerpt 2: Policy Recommendation and Economic Argument

Ohio Health Care Plan - HB 159 - This act strengthens America by creating a doctor/patient-run health care system for all Ohio residents. The first public employer of Clinton County to endorse the Ohio Health Care Plan was the Clinton County Board of Health. The following common wealth institutions would have saved the indicated amount in the past year if the Ohio Health Care Plan was law. Contact the following public employers and encourage them to endorse the plan as the County Board of Health has done. The savings are discovered by acquiring the institutions payroll number and health care costs provided by each institution and then simply doing the math provided in the act.

The Ohio Health Care Plan strengthens American beginning with Ohioans. Now how do we increase the effectiveness of these government assets listed below and reduce the undermining of their moral mission to protect and empower Clinton County residents?

Health Care Savings with Health Care for All Ohioans Act:

⁵ http://www.unionnorthdcc.com/Union_North_DCC/Stronger_America.html

\$0.04 million = Clinton County Board of Health (yes)

\$15.61 million = Clinton Memorial Hospital (2008 audit)

\$1.90 million = Blanchester Schools

\$1.11 million = City of Wilmington

\$2.03 million = Clinton County

\$1.04 million = Clinton-Massie Schools

\$1.32 million = Wilmington City Schools

\$0.03 million = Wilmington Public Library

\$23.08 million = Total of Clinton County's Annual Savings (so far)

About Cognitive Policy Works



**COGNITIVE
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Cognitive Policy Works is both an educational center that provides professional training to people in politics and a research/consulting firm that analyzes the workings of the political mind for non-profits and social businesses. We're a team of experts in political behavior and social change with a powerful combination of skills ranging from psychology and linguistics to media studies and strategic planning.

At the heart of our work is an understanding of human thought and behavior. We analyze cognitive frames, conceptual metaphors, moral worldviews, cultural narratives, and other aspects of political thought to demonstrate the significance of understanding how the mind works in social and political contexts. Unlike other organizations that work in this area, we seek to share our knowledge in the form of practical steps taken by practitioners to incorporate these insights into their daily work. In other words, we focus on the process (how to change what you're doing) instead of merely providing products (in the form of reports and articles). This sets us apart from the standard think tank or consulting firm.

We seek to empower non-profit leaders and grassroots activists alike, through innovative marketing models inspired by the open source software movement. Our goal is to develop new "best practices" and make them widely available to advocates of progressive social change as they face the major challenges of the 21st Century.

Find us online at <http://www.cognitivepolicyworks.com>.