



**COGNITIVE
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Ohioans for an American Health Care Plan

Frame Analysis for Petition Drive

August 27, 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 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.

The focus of our discussion is a petition drive with two purposes:

1. To get residents of Clinton County to pressure their local Democratic and Republican Parties on the need for universal health coverage;
2. To get residents of Clinton County who are concerned about health care more involved in their local political party.

Analysis and Recommendations

The text starts out with a strong title by calling for an “American Health Care Plan” that has the potential to unify citizens from across the political spectrum. Asserting that the United States should have a plan for dealing with health care sounds like a sensible thing to do. It supports arguments about patriotic unity by placing all citizens together in a single category of *Americans*.

The problem is well stated:

“In our present health care emergency, brought on by the failure of insurance companies to provide health care for all Americans...”

This opening line describes the situation as an *emergency*, where immediate action is warranted, that arose due to the inadequacies of insurance companies. This frames the context as having two distinct groups of people - American citizens and insurance

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companies. The reader is likely to identify more closely with fellow citizens, especially if s/he is untrusting of corporations (which is a fairly common attitude across the U.S. right now).

The text goes on to clarify the problem:

“Ends the insurance company bureaucracy, excessive private taxation, rationing and denial of care, and the governance of the patient / doctor relationship for profit and not care.”

Here the problem is elaborated as one of wasteful bureaucracy and immoral practices in health insurance companies. These companies are tied to issues people recognize as the source of dysfunction. This frames the problem as one of *corporate imposition*, an important shift from the widespread (but false) narrative about government being the source of societal problems.

The only concern we find with this excerpt is the phrase “excessive private taxation.” This is an unfamiliar term that is likely to confuse the reader. Does it imply that taxation is the problem? If so, it reinforces the notion that *taxes are burdens* and undercuts pro-government arguments necessary to convince voters that a publicly managed health care system is preferable. Does it imply that the private sector is taxed too much? This also undercuts pro-government arguments.

We recommend replacing “excessive private taxation” with “excessive costs passed onto citizens in order to maximize corporate profits” because this makes it more clear how insurance companies are causing the burden of health care costs to be placed on citizens.

The lead off statement of the final paragraph is especially strong. Referencing the humble beginnings of women’s suffrage tells a powerful story in a simple and intuitive way. This tells the reader that local civic engagement can lead to an inspiring nation-wide outcome. Implied in this story is the potential for everyday people (like the reader) to be part of something bigger than themselves. This creates a starting point for talking about getting more involved in their local political party.

In conclusion, the petition drive is well written for advocates of universal health coverage. Minor revision to the text describing the nature of the problem will help clarify how insurance companies are contributing to the intensity of our health care emergency.

Otherwise the text provides a strong foundation for encouraging civic engagement. Well done!

Appendix - Written Materials for Frame Analysis

The following text is taken from the precinct representative's petition statement. It provides the "data" for performing frame analysis on health care strategies of Representative Watts and his precinct constituents.

Petition Statement

Ohioans for an American Health Care Plan Petition

In our present health care emergency, brought on by the failure of insurance companies to provide health care for all Americans, we the people, being registered voters of the Democratic Party of Clinton County, Ohio, believe human dignity and American patriotism demands:

1. An American health care plan - a patient/doctor-run health care plan for all Americans, that
2. Ends the insurance company bureaucracy, excessive private taxation, rationing and denial of care, and the governance of the patient / doctor relationship for profit and not care.

Women's suffrage was a states' rights issue, begun in Wyoming, before it became national right. In that spirit, we believe Ohio is positioned to lead national health care reform through passage of the Ohio Health Care Plan, H.B. 159, taking a first step toward expansion of an American Health Care Plan. Therefore, we join the Clinton County Board of Health, which has endorsed H.B. 159, in working for its passage, and we call for our Clinton County Democratic Party to endorse both the Ohio Health Care Plan and the American Health Care Plan.

Y/N (Yes/No) I am willing to meet with others in my precinct to build a stronger common enterprise for a better future and a broader prosperity.

Looking out for each other makes America stronger.

About Cognitive Policy Works



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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.

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