



**KINKY**  
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**GOVERNOR 2006**

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## **Kinky Friedman Unveils TexasCare** *Proposal for Healthcare Would Cover All Texans*

AUSTIN, Texas — October 18, 2006 — Independent gubernatorial candidate Kinky Friedman today announced TexasCare, a program designed to ensure every Texan has access to affordable health care.

“We’re 50<sup>th</sup> in the nation in terms of healthcare, with nearly 6 million Texans lacking basic health insurance,” Friedman said. “The first thing we need to do is put the humanity back in healthcare. It’s time to give more control to the people who have the greatest stake in the system: the patients. It’s just good medicine.”

Texas’ 1.6 million uninsured children – the highest rate of any state – is “the real human tragedy,” he added.

Friedman’s TexasCare will offer subsidized health care for all Texans through a four-tiered schedule of benefits and co-payments. Tier one would cover the lowest income children and include the most benefits and the lowest co-payments, while Tier four would include single adults and households without minor children and would provide the least extensive benefits and highest co-payments.

In order to be eligible for enrollment, individuals would be required to meet income limits, residency requirements and selected other criteria. The program would provide enrollees with health care services through prepaid health plans, also known as managed care services, rather than through a fee-for-services system. TexasCare would cut administrative waste and bureaucratic red tape by centralizing insurance, administrative and payment procedures, which would result in cost savings and better health care service over time.



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TexasCare will work through diverse funding mechanisms that would include 55% funding from the state, 35% from federal grants, and 10% generated through enrollee premiums. In order to maximize the benefit to Texans from TexasCare without creating economic disruption, the program widely spreads its funding sources. These include:

- A 1% fee on the gross revenues of health maintenance organizations (HMOs), nonprofit health service plan corporations, and community integrated service networks;
- A 1% fee on the gross revenues of health care providers, hospitals, surgical centers, and whole sale drug distributors;
- A modest annual fee charged to medium and large businesses that do not provide health coverage to their employees; and
- Licensing fees for international pharmacies approved to sell drugs to Texans.

Because TexasCare will take time to implement, Friedman said he would call for the immediate and full restoration of funding for the state's Children Health Insurance Program, which has seen dramatic budget cuts since 2003. Friedman offered several additional proposals that would improve the state's health care system, including:

- **Restore the patient-physician relationship.** Friedman suggests offering tuition assistance for doctors who agree to become Primary Care Physicians and agree to work in Texas for a specified period of time. One of the biggest problems facing the health care system today is the lack of PCPs, also known as general practitioners. Because of the increased workload and insurance industry requirements, the primary care physician has become little more than a triage officer or a medical traffic cop. "We need to restore the patient-physician relationship, not because of Norman Rockwell era-nostalgia, but because it's good medicine," Friedman said.
- **Address the nursing shortage.** The nationwide nursing shortage is creating difficulties for the health care system and creating intense competition for existing nurses. To help Texas retain these valuable individuals, Texas also needs to offer tuition assistance for accredited nursing program students in exchange for an agreement to work as a nurse in Texas for a specified period of time.
- **Bring back the school nurse.** The nursing shortage is especially chronic when it comes to school nurses. "The school nurse from our childhood is now almost



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extinct, thanks to the nursing shortage and school funding issues. That's not just a shame, that's a tragedy," Friedman said. "I want to make a bargain with Texas school districts: if your district agrees to implement a rigorous curriculum emphasizing a good diet and regular exercise, then the state will help you find the money for full-time school nurses."

- **Join other states in funding stem cell research.** It is time for Texas to join the growing list of states, with both Republican and Democratic governors, which are actively supporting embryonic stem cell research. Embryonic stem cell research will be a major part of medical advances for the foreseeable future. This is more than a medical issue; it is an economic development and quality of life issue. Stem cell research offers us real hope of finding better treatments or even cures for heart disease, diabetes, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, Multiple Sclerosis, and spinal cord injuries. "If that isn't pro-life, I don't know what is," Friedman said.
- **Improve services for university students.** Over the past 20 years, the health care available to Texas students through their universities and colleges has progressively declined. Friedman supports increased funding to Texas universities for the purposes of expanding and improving health care services available to students through their institutions.
- **Emphasize preventive medicine.** On average, a Texan can look forward to one year less of life than a New Yorker, two years less than someone from California or Colorado, and three years less than someone from Minnesota or Hawaii. If we want to improve the health of Texans and save our state money in the long-term, we must push preventive medicine and public health.
- **Make prescription drugs more affordable.** It is time for Texas to follow the lead of at least four other states (Minnesota, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, and Washington) and make it possible for Texans to purchase drugs from approved pharmacies outside of the United States, either in person or on-line. Overseas pharmacies would be required to go through a rigorous inspection and application process as well as pay an annual licensing fee that would go into the TexasCare fund. Patients would also be required to present an original prescription for the medication from a doctor licensed to practice medicine in the United States.

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