



Edwards highlights child health care, after-school programs at forum

By Jack Loftus, 10/21/03

DURHAM - The first in a series of Every Child Matters Forums was held at the University of New Hampshire Monday morning, featuring Democratic presidential candidate Sen. John Edwards, D-N.C.

The forum featured six pre-determined questions asked by president of Every Child Matters Michael Petit and WMUR-TV 9 news director and anchor Scott Spradling, as well as questions fielded from audience members assembled in Huddleston Hall on the UNH campus.

The questions from Spradling and Petit touched on issues centered on children, such as child-abuse prevention and treatment, children's health, K-12 education, prekindergarten education, after-school programs, and economic security.

Edwards was scheduled to attend the inaugural forum at 10 a.m., and started the discussion with opening remarks that established his opinion of children's health care.

"Health care should be 100 percent mandated, regulated by law in the same way as public education," Edwards said, adding such coverage should be provided regardless of background or income.

The \$53 billion per year health-care plan outlined by Edwards would be paid for by eliminating tax cuts for people who make more than \$200,000 a year, and

by raising the capital gains rate for those who make more than \$300,000 a year, the North Carolina senator said.

Edwards said he believed those who worked for a living should not pay more in taxes than those who made income off investments.

The theme of the forum was the welfare of children, and the first question from Stradling focused the discussion on after-school programs and how, as president, Edwards would support these issues.

"This is an issue that is very personal to me," Edwards said. "My wife Elizabeth and I started two after-school programs. The first in 1996, was open from 2 to 10 p.m.

"We saw up close how important having after-school is," he said.

In contrast, Edwards addressed President Bush and his proposal to cut more than 500 after-school programs.

The role of the federal government should be to close the gap between the "two types of public schools" that have emerged in the United States, Edwards said. The two types of public schools were no longer based on race, as they once were, but were now centered on economic conditions, he said.

"Go into an affluent community and you'll find shiny new schools," Edwards said.

The role of the federal government should be to entice new teachers to work in less-affluent communities with incentive programs and financial aid. The better education children would receive in these locations would help with other areas of early childhood development, Edwards said.

A question from Petit addressed Edwards' platform and the promise of 100 percent coverage for every child in America.

Edwards responded by saying every child would become eligible for health care at birth, and those children up to the age of 21 would be required to enroll in the program upon entering a doctor's office or when applying for school.

In addition to the pre-determined questions that all attending candidates will be asked to answer, the audience was asked to participate with questions of their own.

Topics touched upon by the audience included gun control and safety for children, quality early health care to all children, and a foreign-policy question from Melissa Morin of Plus Time N.H. concerning Edwards' view of the U.S. role in helping the children of the developing world.

"It is enormously important to show the rest of the world that we care not only about our own peace and prosperity but also about theirs," Edwards said.