



Kerry reinforces platform on children's issues, health care

By Jack Loftus, 10/21/03

DURHAM - On Monday, Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., established his stance on children's issues and his proposed \$75-billion health-care plan at the Every Child Matters Forum for Democratic presidential candidates in Huddleston Hall on the University of New Hampshire campus.

The forum was the second of eight to be held in Huddleston Hall, centering on children's health and welfare issues.

Democratic presidential candidate John Edwards preceded Kerry during a forum held earlier in the day.

After a brief opening, the Massachusetts senator fielded a set of six questions from Every Child Matters President Michael Petit and WMUR-TV 9 anchor Scott Spradling that each of the eight candidates will be asked to answer during their respective forums. Select audience members were also asked to prepare a question.

Kerry, who chose to stand while answering questions, said he has become very weary of responding to questions of "why every child matters," especially after a career in law that saw "kid after kid getting involved with the court systems."

"It was chaos, and children don't do well in chaos," Kerry said,

stressing the importance of early childhood education.

Kerry said the most important years to educate children fell within the newborn to five-year range, because those were the years deemed most important to establishing skills like reading, writing and basic values. If he becomes president, Kerry said he would make the law such that the range increased to 8 years of age.

On the issue of child neglect, Kerry said the answer lay in the commitment to adult intervention.

"(Last year) \$20 billion was spent to investigate child abuse," Kerry said. "Wouldn't it be smart to spend this money before the abuse starts?"

"We should intervene at the earliest stage to prevent it, and take at-risk parents and educate them," he said.

An environmental question from a Portsmouth Middle School student moved the forum in a new direction, as the student wanted to know how a President Kerry would help the environment.

"We are the guardians of this planet," Kerry answered. "And President Bush is undoing the

laws we put in place (for clean air and clean water)."

The answer coincided with Kerry's announcement later in the day concerning his new six-point environmental plan aimed at cleaning up the nation's air and water, fighting global warming and achieving energy independence.

According to The Associated Press, Kerry declared himself "the true environment president," and said he would clean up toxic sites, protect public lands, reduce dangerous air emissions and protect waterways from pollution. He also proposed reducing America's dependency on foreign oil and making the nation a leader in tackling global warming.

Kerry concluded the forum with remarks that touched on his belief that his history with law, politics, the military and the community would make him the perfect man for the job.

"In the Army they have a saying that they will never leave a wounded man behind, and in the Marines they will never leave any man behind," Kerry said. "In my administration we are never going to leave any American behind."