



STAYING ON MESSAGE:

Sample Television Interview

The following provides examples of likely questions in a hypothetical interview with a San Francisco television public affairs reporter, and two kinds of responses the interview subject -- a California health care advocate -- might consider. In each case, the second response is preferable, as it is framed to reflect FrameWorks' latest research about most effective lines of communication with California voters on the issue of health care reform.

Host: Our next guest this evening is Susie Woods, executive director of the Healthy Families Fund, a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the quality of health care for all of our fellow Californians. Thank you for joining us, Susie. So despite recent headlines about lawmakers' efforts to increase access to health care for the uninsured, the problem only seems to grow worse.

Weak answer: Well, I'm afraid you're right, Larry. In fact, a new report by Families USA, drawing on Census Bureau data, found that 74.7 million Americans under 65 years of age - almost one out of three - were uninsured at some point during 2001-2002. Almost two-thirds of these uninsured people were without health coverage for at least six months, and nearly one-quarter were uninsured throughout the two-year period. And in our own state, we face a crisis of unprecedented proportions. More than 6.7 million Californians are today uninsured, creating a nightmare scenario for themselves, their families, and the state taxpayers who must often pay the tab for their uncompensated care.

DON'T:

- *Use "crisis" frame;*
- *Overwhelm with barrage of negativism framing problem as too big to fix;*
- *Set up "us v. them" construct, by focusing on groups of people*
- *List a series of numbers without interpretation*

Strong answer: Well, it is true that we're facing a very real challenge at a critical time in our state's history, Larry, but it's not too late to get ahead of the problem by fixing the system where it's broken. Right now, if you are taking your first job, get divorced, get downsized, work for small business, take a part-time job or early

retirement, you are very likely to end up in situations where health care is unavailable to you and too costly to afford on your own. We know that 6.7 million Californians find themselves shut out of the system. That's close to one in every five Californians – the equivalent, amazingly, of the combined populations of our three largest cities (Los Angeles, San Diego and San Jose), with most of San Francisco thrown in as well. Unlike the modern networks that are essential to our economy and our quality of life – like phone systems and the Internet, water systems, and interstate highways -- with health coverage we're stuck in the 1940s. We never built a modern Health Coverage Infrastructure. Instead, we still have job-based insurance, which has become an increasingly hit-or-miss, inefficient and unreliable approach. We have the equivalent of scattered wells, individual generators, and county roads but no Health Coverage Infrastructure we can rely on, no system for making sure that people have health coverage. This affects all of us, because the health care system only works well when we all share the benefits and costs. At a time when the state faces really tough budget constraints, it's going to take principled leadership and decisive action to address these challenges in our health care system, but we believe firmly that the problem **can** be solved.

DO:

- *Use positive language emphasizing opportunity to 'get ahead of problem' take 'responsible action', capitalize on 'critical moment' in time*
- *Emphasize theme that solutions are attainable*
- *Focus on situations, not groups or individuals*
- *Focus on inclusion and universality rather than exceptionalization of targeted groups*

Host: With all of the urgent problems facing our state – a massive budget deficit, an education system on the ropes, and the hemorrhaging of our highly skilled workforce in the tech sector, to name a few – is it reasonable to expect Sacramento to overhaul the entire health care system?

Weak answer: In our view, there's simply no alternative. If the health care system is not reformed from the top down, those of us who work hard and play by the rules will end up paying for it anyway. Besides, we're all in this fix together. Even those with top-notch health care coverage aren't immune from the communicable diseases spread by our neighbors who aren't as fortunate to access that care, for example. The hard-working immigrant, the single mother of three children, and the senior-level chief executive are connected by a shared fate that compels us to find workable solutions to this problem.

DON'T:

- *Emphasize Californians' connections to each other in negative ways like cost shifting and risk of communicable disease;*
- *Single out groups, which can cue anti-immigrant sentiments or resentment toward undeserving poor.*

Strong answer: At the Healthy Families Fund, we believe that Californians must recognize the important values embodied in our civic “connectedness” to understand how working together can benefit us all. For example, research done by Professor Rich Riskpool, a leading health care economist at Stanford’s Graduate School of Business, has shown that coverage for all citizens of the state -- with everyone paying at least something for care – would likely result in lower premiums for all of us. It helps to think about this problem in terms we can all relate to like, say, constructing a building. Insured people are like the pillars that hold up the health care system, by paying in, whether a little or a lot, for their care. People without insurance still use the Health Care System, but they are missing pillars because they are not paying in regularly, and not helping support the system. These millions of missing pillars are threatening the stability of the health care coverage system.

So in answer to your question, it’s precisely at a time like this – when the state is facing so many pressing challenges and constraints – that we should seize the opportunity to start fixing the system, saving money and improving health care in the long run.

DO:

- *Emphasize Californians' health interdependence in productive ways like cost sharing and prevention;*
- *Use vivid language and metaphors to translate cost sharing and risk pools*

Host: We’ve been tinkering at the margins of this problem for as long as I’ve been in broadcast journalism, which is a very long time. In your view, will anything short of a full-scale overhaul solve the problems we face today?

Weak answer: To be frank, Larry, nothing other than a massive reform of our troubled system will do the trick. As a nation, we should never have let things get this bad. And in the state of California, we should have learned from the mistakes we made with regard to our education system, our budget crisis, and our energy crisis before that. But now that the health care system is so badly broken, we must pull together and fix it immediately, once and for all.

DON'T:

- *Frame solution as “all or nothing” proposition;*
- *Set up need for reform in context of other state crises – everything in CA is in crisis.*

Strong answer: Ultimately, our nation needs to achieve fundamental reform in a health care system that has deep potholes all along the road of life: from first job to retirement. But we can fix the system in incremental fashion, taking small but meaningful steps to expand coverage and promote fundamental improvement in the health status of all Americans /Californians. And we can start by reaching out to assist people who are working hard to “do right” by their employees and their families: The small business owner who wants to cover her employees but can’t afford to do so; the widow who has lost her husband and her health insurance; the family with a first-time worker too old for family coverage and not covered at work. These are situations where the system is broken, and leaves people falling through the cracks. We can repair these places, so this doesn’t happen. Little by little, we can work together to ensure that California comes up with solutions that don’t leave people in precarious situations.

DO:

- *Stress “step by step” solutions in context of broader plan for long-term reform. Public has to see both at same time to be persuaded;*
- *Identify the situations the system breaks down, not the people with the problem*
- *Focus on situations in which many people are likely to find themselves, rather than group identities like race, poor families, etc.*