

**Moore Information, Inc.
Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc.**

MEMORANDUM

TO: AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION
FROM: MOORE INFORMATION, INC. & PETER D. HART RESEARCH ASSOCIATES, INC.
DATE: MAY 30, 2003
RE: KEY FINDINGS FROM RECENT FOCUS GROUPS

On behalf of the American Medical Association, Moore Information, Inc. and Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. conducted a total of eight focus group sessions among likely voters to explore perceptions of physicians as political candidates and explore current issues facing the health care industry. Two groups were conducted in each of four different locations, with one group held among men and one among women at each location. The specifications of the groups are outlined below.

- ✦ Moore Information conducted four sessions in all: two groups were held among likely voters in Smyrna, Georgia (Georgia 11th C.D.) on April 29, 2003, and two sessions were conducted among likely voters in Dallas, Texas (Texas 26th C.D.) on May 6, 2003.*
- ✦ Hart Research conducted four sessions in all: two groups were held among likely voters in South San Francisco, California (California 12th C.D.) on April 22, 2003, and two sessions were conducted among likely voters in Albany, New York (New York 21st C.D.) on May 7, 2003.*

Overview

While there are some attitudinal differences and perceptions among voters in the four locations, what is striking about this qualitative research is the general consensus among voters when it comes to their image of physician candidates, the qualities they ascribe to physicians, and their impressions of how well physicians would handle key issues if elected to a state legislature or Congress. Indeed, despite the fact that two groups were conducted in Congressional districts currently represented by Republicans (GA 11th C.D. and TX 26th C.D.) and two were held in Democratic Congressional districts (CA 12th C.D. and NY 21st C.D.), it is the similarities of the groups rather than their differences that stand out. Furthermore, while there are some distinctions between men's and women's issue priorities and while men tend to be even more drawn to candidates with business backgrounds than are women, the differences in attitudes towards and impressions of physician candidates by gender are minor.

Participants in the groups held doctors in high regard, describing them as honest, caring individuals with a sense of community and genuine concern for people's well being. These qualities are certainly a plus for doctors, but they must be linked to a record of effectiveness and

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involvement on issues that voters care about in order to provide an advantage for doctors running for office.

Indeed, while a lot of positive, personal traits are attributed to doctors, there was a sense that this occupation is limited in scope and therefore, does not always provide the necessary experience to handle the many different issues that elected officials must deal with. Looking at potential issues, there was no perception that doctors could not address issues such as taxes, education, national security and budget issues; participants' viewed doctors as generally capable of dealing with these issues. But when asked whether a businessperson or lawyer or doctor would do better dealing with the abovementioned issues, lawyers and businesspeople were more often chosen than doctors because voters felt they were better equipped based on their occupational training and skills. Doctors, did however, have a big advantage over lawyers and businesspeople on health care issues. Although it was clear that doctors' expertise on health care issues alone was not enough.

These groups illustrate that it will be essential for physician candidates to demonstrate their competence and practical experience on issues other than health care. If doctor candidates are able to demonstrate experience dealing with a variety of issues, then the personality traits attributed to their profession (honesty, caring, good judgment) can be a major advantage. Below are some key recommendations for physician candidates that emerge from the discussions. *However, the specific background, characteristics, and issue positions of an individual candidate are obviously the key differentiating factors that matter most to voters.*

- ✍ Connect their medical background to dealing with health care issues. Health care is an important issue of concern to many voters, and the area in which doctor candidates have the greatest credibility and can make the biggest contribution. It will be important for doctor candidates to capitalize on it.
- ✍ Show voters that they are multi-dimensional. While doctors are thought to have an advantage in dealing with health care issues, voters are looking for candidates who will focus on other issues of concern, especially jobs and the economy, as well as national security, education, and corporate ethics. Demonstrate competence and practical experience on issues beyond health care by showcasing community involvement or other active involvement on these issues.
- ✍ Highlight the hard work that got them where they are today. Voters are looking for elected officials who understand the "average" person and the sacrifices required and challenges that must be faced to achieve success today. While some voters don't feel that doctors would relate to their situations because they see doctors as wealthy, voters don't begrudge doctors their success and recognize that they went through many expensive years of schooling to get where they are.
 - ✍ On a related note, a credible argument can be made that a doctor candidate will be a strong education advocate committed to improving education because of his/her own extensive schooling.

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- ✍ Beware of some skepticism about doctors' independence from the special interests in the health care industry. Some participants express concern about the degree to which pharmaceutical companies court physicians in an attempt to market their products and this raises some questions about doctors' independence.

On health care issues, participants voiced a lot of concerns about the state of health care in the nation today, both in terms of cost, quality, and access. However, they do not blame doctors for these problems. The brunt of the blame is placed on insurance companies/HMOs, the government, and lawyers. Given the fact that many were concerned about how lawsuits are impacting health care, it was not surprising that medical liability reform was widely favored in all groups. While some were concerned that a \$250,000 cap on non-economic damages may not be enough, voters definitely supported some sort of limit on how much money juries could award victims.

Issues Overview

Voters used words including concerned, worried, nervous, and disappointed to describe their feelings about the direction of the country today. Their anxiety stems not only from the war in Iraq and homeland security issues but is largely founded in their concern about the current economic climate. Indeed, economic issues were the leading top of mind issue concerns for participants, including concerns about investments (especially retirement savings), jobs, and the stock market. Other mentions included concerns about big business/corporate ethics (mentions of Enron), national security, and immigration. Women in Smyrna, South San Francisco and Albany also expressed concern about education (both primary and secondary) in their states.

While health care was a top issue priority for some participants in South San Francisco and Albany, it was not volunteered as an issue of concern by participants in Smyrna or Dallas. Nonetheless, when participants in the latter two locations were probed about what specific health care issues are concerns, there were many. The escalating cost of health care was mentioned in all groups, including both the costs of insurance and prescription drugs. Tied to concern about cost was apprehension about access to health care, with some citing the growing number of uninsured. In fact, there were a few uninsured participants who recounted the concern they have about obtaining access to health care should it become necessary.

Participants also expressed some concern about the quality of health care, with the general consensus among the groups being that doctors do not have the control they used to when it comes to being able to spend time with patients and treat patients. Indeed, while participants expressed many frustrations and concerns about the state of health care today, none blamed doctors for the current situation. There is the sense that physicians' hands are tied by restrictions placed on them by HMOs/insurance companies, and they don't think that government is doing enough to solve the current problems with today's health care system.

While not a top of mind concern for many participants, medical malpractice lawsuits were also mentioned in many of the groups as adding to the problems with the health care system today.

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Indeed, the topic was raised early in the sessions by participants in both of the Albany groups and among the women in South San Francisco and men in Dallas. Participants in Albany and Dallas showed the most heightened awareness of the medical malpractice issue and the idea that lawsuits are having some adverse effects on health care today.

Candidate Qualities

When participants were asked to volunteer what qualities they look for in a candidate, honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, responsiveness, and a strong work ethic were deemed most important. While personal traits such as honesty were mentioned more often as being desirable candidate qualities, other mentions by participants that did not focus on personal qualities included having a good track record or a good business record. Indeed, some participants focused on the importance of being effective and knowing how to get things done whether it be in the state house or in the United States Congress. While this practical skill of effectiveness was not the first quality participants mentioned as being important, subsequent discussion reveals that they recognize it as a necessity that elected officials be able to navigate the legislative system in order to get things done for their constituents. As discussed later in this memo, this is an area in which voters raised some questions about physician candidates.

When asked to rate the importance of 16 qualities using a 10-point scale, where 10 is extremely important and one is not important at all, “honest; high standard of ethics” (9.5 average rating) and “effective; can get things done” (9.2) ranked the highest. As the average ratings below indicate, none of these traits are seen as unimportant qualities in a candidate. Nonetheless, other traits that were among the top tier were “has good judgment in crisis” (8.9), “principled” (8.9), and “follows through on commitments” (8.9).

Overall, participants wanted to see a candidate they could trust to “do what’s right.” Interestingly, while “charismatic” received the lowest ratings in each group, one participant did point out that it probably did have the most influence when it actually came to voting.

Importance of Selected Qualities for Candidates
(0=not at all important; 10= extremely important)

	Average Rating #
Honest; high standard of ethics	9.5 ¹ (10.0) ² (8.9) ³
Effective; can get things done	9.2 (9.4) (8.9)
Has good judgment in a crisis	8.9 (9.2) (8.6)
Principled; has the courage of his/her convictions	8.9 (9.1) (8.6)
Follows through on commitments	8.9 (8.9) (8.8)
Good listener	8.8 (8.8) (NA)
A strong leader	8.7 (8.9) (8.4)
Independent of special interests	8.3 (8.9) (7.7)
Cares about the average person	8.3 (8.3) (8.3)
Intelligent	8.2 (8.3) (8.1)
In touch with the community	8.2 (8.3) (8.0)
Shares your values	8.1 (8.7) (7.4)
Hardworking	8.1 (8.2) (7.9)
Solves problems creatively	7.9 (8.1) (7.6)
Future-oriented	7.8 (7.3) (8.3)
Charismatic	6.5 (6.7) (6.2)

¹The first number shown indicates the average rating for all 8 sessions.

²Data shown within first set of parentheses reflects the average rating for the 4 groups in Republican Congressional districts.

³Data shown within second set of parentheses reflects the average rating for the 4 groups in Democratic Congressional districts.

Occupational Background of Candidates

There is a strong desire for some new blood in state capitals and in Washington, as participants said they would like to see these legislative bodies reflect a wider range of the population. There is a broad awareness that most members of Congress are lawyers, and, while participants understand the value of electing someone who has experience with the law, they expressed a desire for more diverse representation. They would like to see more candidates with other types of occupational backgrounds and more people who have worked hard to get where they are.

In looking at how a candidate's occupational background impacts voting decisions, we found that, in most groups, voters leaned toward those whom they thought would have the most practical experience and whom they perceived would be most effective.

When asked which occupational backgrounds they thought would be most appealing for candidates, participants in all groups were most likely to mention businesspeople, and subsequent discussion revealed a greater sympathy for small business owners than corporate executives. (Men were the most disposed to business people as candidates, but many women also recognized them as having the kinds of backgrounds and skills that would make them well qualified to be a legislator.) The appeal of businesspeople derived mainly from participants' sense that those with

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business experience would have the most practical experience to help them be effective and get things done. Furthermore, in this time of economic uncertainty and budget deficits, there was a strong preference for a candidate who has had experience meeting a bottom line.

An argument about doctors' experience running a small business was tested in some of the sessions to see how effective it would be in making the case that physicians have the kind of business experience in meeting bottom lines and dealing with budgets that many voters feel is important. Unfortunately, few participants felt this was a credible argument, as most do not think that doctors actually administer their offices themselves. There is a sense that doctors are effective in practicing medicine and treating patients, but they hire others to manage their office and budget.

Interestingly, it appeared that in each group, participants had a general, perhaps stereotypical, perception of lawyers, businesspeople, and retired members of the military. There was a standard vision in their head of what these occupations stood for and the skills these professionals would possess. However, participants' perceptions of doctors were all very personal and based on their experiences with their own doctors. It is this example of how participants relate to doctors that could explain why they are more likely to associate "personal" traits to doctors and "professional" attributes to lawyers and businesspeople.

Several participants suggested that a candidate with a background as a physician would be appealing, mainly because of physicians' personal traits of honesty, integrity, and hard work and because they see physicians as wanting to help people. However, for most participants in these sessions, a transition from doctor to member of Congress was a less logical career move than from lawyer or businessperson to legislator, and this raised some concerns about a physician candidate being the best fit for state senator or member of Congress.

In the Smyrna and Dallas groups, when forced to choose between a doctor candidate and a business candidate (and asked to base their decision solely on the candidate's occupation), the businessperson was favored by a five to one margin. Participants favoring the businessperson felt they would be better equipped with the type of management, delegation, and economic skills needed for dealing with budgets.

When the choice was between a retired military officer and a doctor, the military officer was favored over the doctor in three of the four groups in Dallas and Smyrna. Reactions were mixed between a lawyer and doctor in three of these groups, but one group universally favored the doctor. A military person was favored by people who said they associated military personnel with discipline, honor, and leadership. Additionally, while there was general distrust and in some groups a real dislike for lawyers, participants favoring a lawyer saw them as better equipped to deal with lawmaking and having more relevant experience for the job.

Importantly, in all groups, it was clear that regardless of occupation, it was the candidate's stance on issues that would be most important.

General Perceptions of Doctors

Doctors were held in high regard in each of the groups. Being a doctor is still viewed as a “noble” profession and a lot of positive qualities are associated with doctors. Participants see them as honest, caring individuals with a sense of community and genuine concern for people’s well being. In addition, there was fairly widespread awareness of the Hippocratic Oath, and people generally knew it was a code of conduct oath. They didn’t give it much thought, however, and it really had no impact on their perceptions of doctors as candidates.

When it comes to a physician’s area of specialty, the types of doctors that generated the most appeal as potential candidates are primary care physicians, cardiologists, pediatricians, and emergency room doctors. While some participants were less enthused about plastic surgeons or ophthalmologists as candidate, physicians of these specialties who treat children or individuals with disfiguring or life-threatening conditions were seen as more sympathetic and appealing.

On the other hand, the biggest potential drawback for doctors wanting to run for political office is the perception that doctors are limited in their scope. Several participants expressed concern about doctor’s preparedness to navigate the legislative process, and there was little sense of doctors having any particular expertise or relationship with issues other than those that are health care-related. However, given the importance that participants place on health care (especially cost and accessibility) and prescription drugs, physicians were seen as having an advantage in dealing with this high priority issue.

In addition, while past AMA research indicated some skepticism about why physicians would leave medicine to run for elected office, only a few participants in these sessions expressed concern or doubt about this. There was a general understanding that a doctor may decide to serve the community or common good in a new way by entering public service; and most assume that if a physician candidate were elected, the extent to which they practice medicine would be cut back or they may stop practicing day-to-day. On the other hand, a physician candidate’s explanation of why he or she has decided to run for office is important in positioning him or her and giving voters an understanding of his/her issue priorities, which matter a great deal to voters.

While opinions are still positive, there has clearly been a change in perceptions of doctors in recent years. People feel they do not have as personal a relationship with their physician and as a result are not getting the same amount of attention or level of care as in years past. They see doctors as more business-like, spending more time filling out paperwork, etc. and spending less time with patients. Importantly, though, participants do not blame doctors for these changes. Instead, they were very sympathetic to doctors’ difficulties as a result of the health care system. In terms of who is at fault for the current state of the health care system (which widely derided) no one entity got all the blame. Insurance companies/HMOs, lawyers, government, and hospital administration were all held responsible.

Advantages for Physician Candidates

Qualities

In addition to finding out what qualities the participants attribute to doctors and the qualities important for a candidate to possess, participants were also asked which qualities they felt doctors would have an advantage on over candidates of other backgrounds. In the eight sessions, candidates who are doctors were seen as having the greatest advantage over other candidates on the following traits: cares about average person, intelligent, has good judgment in crisis, honest, and hardworking. Some also thought that doctors would have an advantage in the areas of being principled and solving problems creatively.

While doctors are seen as more likely to possess these traits than candidates from other backgrounds, however, it is important to remember that these traits are only an advantage for a candidate when combined with real world, hands-on experience and attention to issues that matter to voters. These personal traits alone are not enough to get elected.

Selected Qualities for Candidates (0=not at all important; 10= extremely important)		
	Average Rating of Importance	Doctors Have Advantage
	#	
Honest; high standard of ethics	9.5	✓
Effective; can get things done	9.2	-
Has good judgment in a crisis	8.9	✓
Principled; has the courage of his/her convictions	8.9	✓
Follows through on commitments	8.9	-
Good listener	8.8	-
A strong leader	8.7	-
Independent of special interests	8.3	✓
Cares about the average person	8.3	✓
Intelligent	8.2	✓
In touch with the community	8.2	-
Shares your values	8.1	-
Hardworking	8.1	✓
Solves problems creatively	7.9	✓
Future-oriented	7.8	-
Charismatic	6.5	-

It is notable that physician candidates are thought to have an advantage on some of the traits that voters indicate are most important to them, but the one area of importance where they are not seen as possessing any lead is in terms of being effective. This reinforces some concerns expressed by participants in the groups about doctors' ability to get things done in Congress.

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In all the groups, some participants expressed skepticism about physicians' ability to be independent of special interests. This sentiment stemmed mostly from concerns about the relationship between physicians and pharmaceutical companies. Indeed, in Albany in particular, participants in both groups commented on the extent that pharmaceutical companies go to get doctors to prescribe their drugs, including taking them on expense-paid trips, providing free samples, and other direct marketing tactics.

Issues

To further probe participants' perceptions of how doctors measure up to other professions, participants were asked who would be best equipped to deal with 11 different issues: doctors, businesspeople or lawyers. Doctors only beat lawyers and businesspeople on one issue in all groups: improving health care. Nonetheless, doctors also had an advantage among most participants on making prescription drugs more affordable and protecting Medicare. Interestingly, men in Smyrna and Dallas also favored doctors over candidates with other professional backgrounds for promoting basic values such as family and community, but in the other groups nearly everyone thought a candidate's profession would have no real impact on the issue.

Which candidate would do the best job in addressing selected issues— a doctor, lawyer, businessperson, or would it make no difference?

Improving health care	Doctor
Making prescription drugs more affordable for seniors	Doctor
Protecting Medicare	Doctor
Promoting basic values, such as family and community values and personal responsibility	No difference
Improving education	No difference
Protecting Social Security	Businessperson/No difference
Strengthening homeland security and fighting terrorism	No difference
Protecting against corporate corruption and abuse	Lawyer
Promoting jobs and economic growth	Businessperson
Dealing with taxes	Businessperson
Dealing with budget issues	Businessperson

Because businesspeople and lawyers were more easily identified as having transferable skills that would be very applicable in political office (business management, delegation, etc.), these occupations were sometimes seen as more effective on certain issues than doctors would be. Lawyers were given the advantage in protecting against corporate corruption and abuse, while businesspeople were deemed most capable of promoting jobs and economic growth, dealing with taxes and dealing with budget issues. Some participants also thought a businessperson might be better at protecting Social Security, but many thought that there would be no difference between the three candidates on this issue.

Importantly, doctors are not perceived as incapable of tackling issues such as taxes, education, Social Security and budget and economic issues. But, the transition was not as natural for participants from doctor to political officeholder and the duties those positions require. Addressing health care issues was a no-brainer. Participants would expect a physician to address

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health care issues, but it was apparent that a candidate's issue platform must address more than just health care.

Messages

Seven arguments as to why doctors are good candidates were also tested in each of the groups. Participants were asked to rate each of the following arguments using a ten-point scale where 10 means it is a very convincing argument for voting for a doctor candidate and one means it is not at all convincing. Overall average scores for groups follow.

Messages for Physician Candidates (0=not at all convincing; 10= very convincing)		Average Rating #
Health care: because doctors work in health care on a daily basis, they bring a clear understanding of the problems facing our health care industry and what is required to make it better and more responsive to the needs of the average person		8.4 ¹ (8.2 ²) (8.5 ³)
Commitment on education: because doctors must spend so much time in school they know the value of a strong education and how important it is to a child's future and they will likely be committed to education as a public official		7.4 (6.8) (8.0)
Good judgment in crisis: doctors frequently make life and death decisions and must do so under difficult circumstances and with a clear mind. For this reason, it is unlikely that doctors would make a rash or unwise decision in a crisis		7.1 (6.7) (7.4)
Caring about the average person: because a doctor deals with all kinds of people and their problems on a daily basis, he or she would bring a unique perspective to the job and you can be pretty sure they care about people like us		6.7 (6.4) (6.9)
Future-oriented, looking toward the future: because medical technology is changing so fast, doctors must be aware of new medicines and procedures that can help their patients. This kind of willingness to learn new techniques and try new things is the kind of approach we need in our elected officials		6.5 (6.1) (6.9)
Small business experience: doctors not only have to be good small businessmen and women to run their offices, they also have a great deal of experience with government rules and regulations and would be very effective at making sure government rules and regulations do not overburden the small businessman or woman		6.0 (6.0) (6.0)
High ethics and standards: doctors must go through a rigorous training and must undergo extensive testing to practice medicine. Professionals who exhibit this kind of commitment to their job are likely to be honest and have high ethical standards		5.9 (5.6) (6.1)

¹The first number shown indicates the average rating for all 8 sessions.

²Data shown within first set of parentheses reflects the average rating for the 4 groups in Republican Congressional districts.

³Data shown within second set of parentheses reflects the average rating for the 4 groups in Democratic Congressional districts.

The argument that doctor candidates bring a clearer understanding of health care issues that can help them better address the problems tested best in all of the groups. It is a logical argument and

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it rates highly because health care is a concern of many voters. However, running on health care was again emphasized as a positive only as long as it was part of a whole package. Health care alone was not enough, but could be a major asset given the candidate's personal experience and expertise on the subject.

As mentioned in the overview, the message that doctor candidate's educational background would translate into a public official who would work hard on education issues is a credible argument. And with education being an important issue to many voters, especially women, this could be an important message.

Caring about the average person was also a given for doctors according to most participants. In these groups, participants felt that caring about people and having the courage of their convictions went along with the profession. Judgment in a crisis was also a well-received argument and one that seemed particularly appropriate for some given the current times. It was perceived as helpful and something they may not have considered otherwise. The problem is that neither of these messages by themselves carry a lot of weight—what really matters is the connection between a candidate's background/values and their position on issues of importance to voters.

The small business argument wasn't as strong because many participants pointed out that few doctors run their own practices anymore. As a result they felt that office managers or the company would be taking care of many of those small business management duties. Additionally, it was interesting that high moral ethics didn't rate as high. However, based on the discussions, many don't need to be convinced that doctors are moral. Participants generally attributed high morals to the profession, regardless.