



# ELECTION 2008



## Will the Next President Cancel the ~~DTC~~ 'Party'? (Or Just Throw a Wet Blanket Over It?)

By Evan Tracey and David Kweskin

The Democratic candidates running for the presidency began taking jabs at current healthcare policies and pharmaceutical companies in December 2007. As the campaigns heat up this spring, pharma increasingly is finding itself caught in the cross hairs. The Democratic candidates in particular are taking aim at drug companies in a series of ads spewing negative rhetoric about the industry. Here are just a few examples of the ads that cast pharma in the role of villain, against whom the candidates must act as “protectors.”

- A TV ad from Sen. Barack Obama from December was built on this message: “Right now the law allows drug companies to go to the manufacturers of generic drugs and pay them to keep generic drugs off the market.... Part of [my] plan is to make sure that drug companies cannot price gouge our senior citizens and those who need prescription drugs.”
- A TV ad for Sen. Hillary Clinton from September included the following lines: “She changed future generations by pushing the drug companies to lower the cost of vaccinations.”
- And in December, former Sen. John Edwards (who pulled out of the race in late January) had this to say: “When are we going to stop letting drug companies, insurance companies and their lobbyists run this country?”

Clearly, healthcare is taking center stage as a campaign issue that candidates are hoping will win them support – and they are investing big money to promote their views. In December, Hillary Clinton led the way in spending on healthcare issues – with seven ads airing 3,617 times at a cost of \$4.5 million. Barack Obama slotted into second place, also making hefty healthcare-focused ad buys during this period – spending roughly \$3.2 million on 10 ads airing 2,974 times. John Edwards continued his ad campaign in Iowa and New Hampshire, with seven healthcare-themed ads airing 1,560 times at an estimated cost of \$1.6 million dollars.

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### The Democrats are not alone

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The Democrats are not the only ones looking to healthcare as a hot political topic that will ignite voters’ interest. In December, Republican candidate Mitt Romney aired two ads which mentioned the healthcare topic. And former Gov. Mike Huckabee also aired healthcare spots in Iowa.

In addition, unions, PACs and other organizations are jumping on the healthcare bandwagon. For example, American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees ran two spots 430 times in Iowa in support of Clinton, referencing her commitment to healthcare reform.

## Learning from past advertising rhetoric

Why is it important to watch the content of healthcare-themed ads?

It's been a consistent pattern that the "winning" ad rhetoric (that which is heard loudly and frequently) is an excellent predictor of future legislation and public policy. There are many examples showing how so-called hot topics in campaign ads foreshadowed major policy changes, including:

- *Tobacco settlement legislation in 1998*
- *The Patients Bill of Rights in 2000*
- *The Medicare Prescription Drug bill in 2004*
- *Social Security Reform in 2005*
- *Minimum Wage in 2006*

Will it be DTC's turn to get hit in 2009 and beyond? Watch campaign ad content over the coming months for a good look ahead at what may happen.

## The anti-DTC messages are out there

As the 2008 campaigns get underway, there already are clear political messages emerging that are distinctly anti-DTC in tone. As previously mentioned in DTC Insights, Sen. Edwards, for one, has proposed limitations on DTC and enlarging the power of the FDA, with a program that includes the following:

- A two-year moratorium on consumer advertising for all new drugs. "A delay will ensure that well-informed

doctors – not high-paid consultants – drive prescriptions in the early phases," according to Edwards.

- A requirement that FDA pre-approve prior to launch all "major ad campaigns" and increase penalties for violators of truth-in-advertising laws.
- The need for companies to "tell the public the whole truth about side effects and how effective drugs are against placebos and existing alternatives." This policy, Edwards asserted, would eliminate ads for me-too drugs without the disclosure of less costly alternatives.

## Other elections with anti-DTC sentiment

Yes, drug companies are square in the sights of politicians and their ardent supporters – and that includes the DTC world. And it's not just the potential leader of the executive branch of government who is expressing these opinions. Just listen to what a couple of Senate and even state-level candidates have to say.

In January 2008, Mike Ciresi, who is running for the U.S. Senate from Minnesota, said in his TV ad: "We went after big drug companies that were harming women with unsafe products." From the same state, Al Franken also campaigning for U.S. Senate, had this to declare in a January 2008 TV ad, "The drug companies, the insurance companies and the special interest have gotten their way for far too long in Washington."

A final example, shows anti-DTC messages flourishing, even at the state level. In 2006, Lisa Brown of Michigan ran a TV ad against her opponent for a seat in the state legislature that said, "David Law voted six times to give drug companies complete immunity even when their products cause harm or death."

Clearly, it's tough out there for pharma in general and for DTC in particular. What's going to happen as the elections heat up – and a new administration heads for Washington next year? Watch and count the campaign ad messages over the coming months with anti-drug company and anti-DTC themes. Those will help you predict what you can expect – and prepare to meet the challenge. ■



**Sen. Barack Obama**  
 "Part of [my] plan is to make sure that drug companies cannot price gouge our senior citizens."



**Sen. Hillary Clinton**  
 "She changed future generations by pushing the drug companies to lower the cost of vaccinations."

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