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Rudy Giuliani: Asked About HIV, He Answers With 9/11



Rudy Giuliani gets Iowa punctuality. In fact, he may be the first presidential candidate in years to show up early at a caucus campaign stop. Razzed by the Des Moines Register for running late in his last Iowa trip, the former New York mayor arrived 10 minutes before a scheduled 2:30 Thursday speech at the Spring House, a historic restaurant built on a natural artesian spring in Cedar Rapids.

The bulk of Giuliani's relatively brief visit - 55 minutes from arrival to departure -- was devoted to one on one conversations and autographs. While the event was billed as focusing on energy independence, the crowd of 60 seated patrons and as many more standing folks was more interested in health care.

Loud Muzak drowned out the brief opening remarks of Paul Pate, a former Cedar Rapids

mayor who also served in the Legislature and as secretary of state. Though the music clicked off early during Giuliani's speech, the lack of a microphone made it hard to hear his message.

After about 10 minutes of prepared remarks, Giuliani began taking questions. Asked about increasing federal support for HIV medications, Giuliani discussed what he considers appropriate federal responsibility in health care. "I don't want to promise you the federal government will take over the role," he said, drawing applause and shouts of "all right." Then, in some interesting twists, he turned the HIV question into a 9/11 answer:

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"My general experience has been that the federal government works best when it helps and assists and encourages and sets guidelines... on a state-by-state, locality-by-locality basis. It's no different from the way I look at homeland security. Maybe having been mayor of the city, I know that your first defense against terrorist attack is that local police station, or that local firehouse."

Giuliani has focused on national security issues in his campaign and said the U.S. should be on the offense against terrorism, and use tactics that "aren't illegal but are aggressive" including the Patriot Act and electronic surveillance. "If a Democrat is elected we'll go back to defense on terrorism - they don't face the threat realistically," he said. "They've had three debates, and none of the Democrats has said the words 'Islamic terrorist.' They're in denial, and we need a president who's a realist."

"I'm good at getting things done," Giuliani said, citing his record as mayor and as a U.S. attorney prosecuting mobsters in New York. "I could tell you good stories," he said, but to this writer's great disappointment we heard no tales of busting Big Paul Castellano and John Gotti. Instead he told us, "I took over the crime capital of the United States and made it the welfare-to-work capital."

Energy independence is a way to defeat the terrorists, Giuliani said, citing the dangers of a nuclear Iran. He said it's important to keep a military option against Iran, but we can also win with energy independence. Giuliani called for a broad

mix of resources. "I support all the technologies that give us energy within our own control," with control meaning within the U.S. or with "reliable friends" such as Canada and Mexico.

He cited Brazil's success with ethanol and joined other Republican candidates including Mitt Romney and John McCain in noting France's reliance on nuclear power. He rattled off many other sources -- wind, clean coal and domestic oil (without specifying the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge). "There's no one magic solution. There are, however, a number of solutions that if you support them and push them, each one of them can contribute some part." Giuliani said this mix of energy changes would also address global warming "in a sensible, calm way and not in a hysterical way."

Giuliani's health-care plan is firmly based in the private sector. He proposes a \$15,000 tax exemption for individual health insurance. "If you can find it cheaper, you can keep the difference." He said with 50 million to 100 million Americans participating, this would create a marketplace for affordable individual plans: "Lots of people would buy private health insurance if it was as attractive as employer plans." All plans would have to have some co-payment, to encourage people to make choices about their care.

In an extended analogy, Giuliani likened the cost of health care to the price of TVs in the early 1950s -- prices were high because the marketplace was small. With a larger marketplace prices of TVs have gone down and quality has improved with advancing technology. "It happened because there was a free market," he said. His analogy missed some realities - you won't die if you can't get a plasma TV, but you might die if you can't get to the doctor.

But Giuliani mocked the idea of mandated coverage: "If the government had said, everybody has to get a TV, and we'll help you pay for one if you can't afford it, what would have happened to the price of TVs? When you promise these simplistic results you get disaster, like welfare."

Giuliani also said a promise of universal health care was misguided:

"We don't want socialized medicine. Maybe you should go see 'Sicko,' see if you agree with Michael Moore that we should have the Cuban health care system. That's where the Democrats are taking us... All the places that have government-run health care, it's inferior to us. We've got to preserve our private system. People will have to earn some of that access. Let's not become a nanny state. You don't help somebody when you make them dependent. You make it within their realm to do it, but give them a chance to earn it. The system gets destroyed when you start making big promises."

The bird-doggers from Iowans for Sensible Priorities got in their question about cutting military spending. Giuliani responded with a prompt no: "It's already been done. Clinton cut our military budget by enormous amounts in the 1990s, and it left us in a position where we can't face the dangers we're facing right now." He said he would look for wasteful spending in the military, but would instead reinvest that in increased troop strength and newer technology. Arguing that other parts of the budget could be cut to deal with energy independence, Giuliani said (in seeming contradiction to his approach to health care) that "the market for energy is not a free market" because OPEC and other forces are involved.

A virtually inaudible last question, later rumored to have been about Darfur, prompted Giuliani to discuss the ineffectiveness of the United Nations in dealing with major world crises "since at least the Cuban Missile Crisis."

Attendee Dave Miller left the event undecided - he's holding out hope that Newt Gingrich will run - but impressed with Giuliani. "I love his aggressiveness and ability to say yes or no and not beat around the bush," Miller said. Speaking of Bush, Miller is not fond of the incumbent: "The biggest thing to me is health care and we haven't heard about it in the whole Bush administration." He's not so keen on Congress either. "They had that all-nighter on the war, they're always talking about immigration, but here we have innocent people talking about not having health care."

Missed opportunities: Giuliani missed out on a plate of the Spring House's famous "chilighetti," thick chili served over spaghetti. And the Republican crowd might have appreciated a reference to the sign above the artesian well, noting that the Spring House is "no longer allowed to serve this water because of recent state ecology laws. The management is indeed sorry to have to let such a beautiful natural resource go to waste."

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