

# Bush—A Healthy Future for Our Seniors

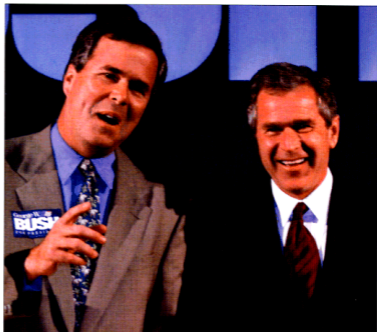
by Governor Jeb Bush

**W**ith the November elections fast approaching, healthcare is a top-priority issue facing candidates and voters. The key reason is our nation's booming senior population. Just look at the amazing numbers. There are almost 35 million Americans today over the age of 65, and that number is expected to double by mid-century. In my own state of Florida, the fourth largest in the nation, there are more than 3.4 million seniors, with 80+ as the fastest growing age group in the state.

I have always paid close attention to the needs of seniors and their impact on policy reform. My brother, George W., also has maintained a strong focus on these seasoned veterans and their needs. And what need could be more important than health? However, today's health scene bristles with perplexing problems: inadequate insurance coverage, the soaring cost of prescription drugs, and the many restrictions of managed care.

One of the most important issues that both my brother and I believe will become even more critical due to this senior boom is *integrative medicine*. Just what does "integrative medicine" mean? I see it as combining the best elements of two worlds: the best of conventional medicine, with its lifesaving drugs and surgical procedures, and the best of alternative medicine, with its natural approaches to chronic diseases.

I can see this integration of the two sides of medicine already taking place. Driving the new partnership is the growing demand for therapies and nutrients that are safe and without side effects. According to current figures from the National Institutes of Health, 46% of Americans used alternative therapies in 1997, up from 36% in 1990. Further, a number of healthcare providers have found these therapies



Jeb Bush, Governor of Florida, with brother George W. Bush, Governor of Texas.

very cost-effective. More and more insurance companies are covering acupuncture, chiropractic, homeopathic, massage therapy, traditional Chinese medicine, and other modalities.

To reinforce the process of change, I would stress the importance of prevention. I advocate preventive measures to maintain wellness, such as regular checkups, screening tests for early detection, public programs to help promote healthy lifestyles, and more effective guidance for dealing with chronic health problems. Prevention also is founded on proper nutrition to maintain wellness and avoid disease, thereby extending life span. This means our seniors should

have access to a full array of nutrients: the vitamins and minerals that tend to become depleted with age as well as the herbs and other natural substances that can relieve chronic disorders.

My brother and I are both concerned with getting better home care and wellness/prevention programs for seniors. The challenge ahead of us is to make sure everyone has access to all health options and to any information that may improve their chances of a long, healthy life. We both believe that ensuring the health of our older population benefits us all, giving us the opportunity to learn from the wisdom and experience they have to offer.