

# The 2008 US presidential election: A look at the candidates

As the race for US president nears the 4 November finish line, Barack Obama and John McCain increasingly talk about the 'change' they would bring to Washington, DC, but what does that mean for biomedical research? *Nature Medicine* has compiled information from campaign platforms, surveys and debates to shed a bit of light on where the candidates and their running partners stand. —By Coco Ballantyne



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	Senator Barack Obama Democratic presidential nominee	Senator Joseph Biden Dem. vice-presidential nominee	Senator John McCain Republican presidential nominee	Governor Sarah Palin Rep. vice-presidential nominee
FUNDING	Pledges to double federal funding for basic research over the next decade and boost funding for agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Along with Biden, promises to double funding for cancer research within five years. Also wants to offer more grants for scientists starting their careers.	Has stated he supports "robust funding" for the US National Institutes of Health (NIH).	Says he has supported increased funding at the National Science Foundation and NIH "for years and will continue to do so." However, he has also stated he would cap domestic non-discretionary spending for at least a year to save government funds.	With Palin's authorization, the state of Alaska appropriated \$7 million over two years for completing the construction and launching operations of a new virology lab that will replace an older, outdated facility on the University of Alaska Fairbanks campus. The new lab meets biosafety level 3 standards. The facility is expected to be up and running in January 2009.
STEM CELLS	Cosponsored the 2007 Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act (eventually vetoed by President Bush), which would have allowed research on human embryos donated from fertility clinics. Promises to lift the ban on federally funded embryonic stem cell research using cell lines created after 9 August 2001. Although he says adult stem cells are promising, he has called embryonic cells the "gold standard" for versatility, in a ScienceDebate2008 survey.	Has alluded to his belief that life begins at conception but also says that he intends to keep his Roman Catholic views out of politics. In the Senate, supported abortion rights and the expansion of federally funded embryonic stem cell research, and voted in favor of the 2007 Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act, which was vetoed by President Bush.	Thinks the federal law allowing abortion should be overturned and opposes the deliberate creation of embryos for research. Voted in favor of the 2007 Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act, because it would have permitted research on embryos that would have otherwise been discarded. Voted to criminalize the use of human fetal tissue grown in the uterus of a human or animal for research purposes.	Has said she opposes any type of stem cell research involving human embryos. She also said she objects to abortion, including in cases of rape or incest.
SPECIFIC DISEASES	Promises to launch a national HIV/AIDS strategy involving all federal agencies during his first year in the White House. Says that he and Biden will push the federal government to put \$1 billion annually toward autism-related efforts, including screening and research, and will work to double the percentage of cancer patients participating in clinical trials.	Staunch advocate of breast cancer research. For 15 consecutive years, the Senate has passed Biden's National Mammography Day resolution, designating a day for clinics around the country to offer free or reduced-cost mammograms. Saw through a resolution designating May 2007 as National Autoimmune Diseases Awareness Month and supporting research funding for such diseases.	Cosponsored the Combating Autism Act of 2006, which has set aside nearly \$1 billion over five years for research, screening and intervention. Cosponsored legislation to increase information about and support for patients receiving positive prenatal and postnatal diagnostic test results for disease conditions such as Down syndrome.	Designated various disease awareness months in Alaska; May 2008 was Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) Awareness Month, and August 2008 was Muscular Dystrophy Awareness Month. As a mother of a child with Down Syndrome, Palin has called attention to the 350,000 people with the condition living in the US.
BIOTECH & PHARMA	Believes Americans should be able to buy safe, low-cost drugs from other countries. Aims to lift the prohibition on government negotiation with pharmaceutical companies. Introduced the Genomics and Personalized Medicine Act, which would authorize the creation of a national biobanking database. Cosponsored the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA).	Believes the federal government should be able to negotiate prices with drug companies to ensure consumers get better deals. Supports faster introduction of generic drugs. Wants a biotechnology coordinator in the executive branch. Cosponsored GINA.	Recognizes a growing need to protect the privacy of people's genetic records. Says he will seek the "wise counsel of experts" to ensure breakthroughs in genetics research can be harnessed to benefit the American people. Has criticized the high cost of drugs and asked people to consider the effect of greater competition among pharmaceutical companies.	As governor of Alaska, Palin declared a 'Biomedical Technician Week' to recognize those who provide safe care through the use of medical devices and develop new medical technologies that contribute to Alaska's economy.
GLOBAL HEALTH	Pledges to double US aid for promoting global health by 2012. Believes that reinforcing public health systems of other countries is crucial for US security, according to a survey by Research!America.	Helped negotiate a bill that tripled spending for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. The bill sets aside \$48 billion over five years for fighting HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis worldwide. Introduced legislation to help develop a global pathogen surveillance and response system.	Reportedly believes 'abstinence until marriage' should be taught in schools. According to the Associated Press, when a journalist asked McCain whether he believes contraceptives help curb HIV transmission, he replied, "You've stumped me."	Maintains a multiagency coordination group in Alaska representing state, federal and tribal governments to prepare for a public health crisis such as a bird flu pandemic.

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