George W Bush proposes insurance help for the poor

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Republican presidential candidate, George W Bush, has proposed up to \$2000 in tax credits to help poor families earning less than \$30,000 to buy health insurance.

The tax credit would cost an estimated \$34.7 billion over 5 years, and campaign aides said that it would help as many as 18 million uninsured Americans to buy health insurance. Vice President Al Gore attacked Mr Bush's record as Texas governor, saying that with his new proposal he was trying to "divert attention from the deplorable state of health care and other issues in Texas."

Democrats said that Mr Bush is especially

vulnerable on the issue because his state has the country's second highest number of uninsured people and some of the highest rates of AIDS, tuberculosis, and diabetes.

The Texas health commissioner, Dr William Archer 3rd, in an interview about the same time, said among other things that Texas's high teenage pregnancy rate had come about because the state's Hispanic population lacked the belief that "getting pregnant is a bad thing."

Later, Archer issued a statement of apology. "I deeply regret that I have created an erroneous impression about Hispanics and teen pregnancy," he said.

Diane Rowland of the Henry J Kaiser Family Foundation and a leading professional on health care costs was doubtful about how much insurance the tax credits would cover. She said that the average cost in 1998 for a group family policy was \$4092. That is what fairly large employers would have to pay, but individuals buying family health insurance would find the cost of premiums much higher. Less expensive policies "would not cover much."

Mr Bush has said nothing about prescription drug benefits under Medicare, but his aides said that he would address that issue later in the campaign.