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Healthcare Socialism

by Scott McPherson

Some ideas die hard. Among the most resilient is the utopian belief that health care could be cheap, free, and available to all, if only we'd let the government take care of it. It was in the spirit of reviving this tragically unwise socialist idea that former president Bill Clinton and Sen. John Breaux (D-La.) addressed separate audiences last week on the need for greater government control over medicine.

Hoping to add greater impetus to the health-care issue for the 2004 presidential election, Clinton told the 2003 National Grassroots Meeting of Families USA, at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C., that Americans should “try to find a bipartisan solution” to the nation’s health-care woes, preferably one involving greater government management. He also lamented his unsuccessful attempt to socialize America’s health-care industry, describing it as a noble act that was “demonized” by his opponents.

On the other side of town, Senator Breaux was making his call for the socialization of medicine in a speech before the U.S. Conference of Mayors. Outlining his own proposal for total medical socialism in this country — “an idea he says he wants to be discussed by all 2004 presidential candidates,” reports the *Washington Times* — he said he believed his plan will “put America back on the right path towards an America where everyone has health insurance and quality health care.”

Some ideas do indeed die hard. For the greater part of the last half century, a number of our more “enlightened” — that is, more socialist-minded — neighbors, such as Canada and the European nations, have nationalized their medical industries and ever since have been struggling to live up to their promise of “health insurance and quality health care” for all. Huge waiting lists for care and visitations with specialists, a lack of sophisticated medical equipment, rising costs (which must be met by rising taxes), and a general increase in dissatisfaction with government-run health care are typical in all countries where the government, literally, calls the shots.

The first error of those who promote “national health care” is their complete inability to accept that nothing in life is certain. Just because a law is passed guaranteeing “quality medical

care for all” doesn’t mean it will happen — though this is certainly a heretical view in today’s climate of government worship. No matter how much they may want it, leftists will have to accept that regardless of the system in place, someone, somewhere, will go without the care he needs. Conventional “wisdom” has maintained that at least under a government system more people will have care than otherwise. But after 50 years of experimentation, the jury is in: Socialized medicine simply cannot deliver the goods.

So the only question is, what system *has* shown itself capable of best distributing the greatest amount of any good or service to the greatest number of people, at the highest quality and lowest price? The answer is the free market. Medical care is no different from any other commodity. In order to be most efficiently and widely distributed, it requires the unfettered signals of supply and demand, lest it fall victim to socialism’s standard shortcomings: bureaucratization, rationing, rising costs, overproduction (in some areas), underproduction (in others), and eventual failure.

Perhaps that is what’s at the root of leftists’ continued belief in the state — they refuse to accept that regardless of how passionately they *feel* about everyone’s need to be covered against medical emergency, reality requires that the proper distribution of goods and services be through a peaceful, voluntary — that is, free — market. Like it or not, medical care is a market good. And we ignore the market’s winds at our peril. The Soviet Union proved the long-run impossibility of socialism, yet it is just this kind of command-and-control mentality which the former president, Senator Breaux, and a whole host of other like-minded American socialists would like to bring to the health-care debate.

Sadly, there isn’t much hope for a spirited, practical, principled counterargument to the highly popular notion of government intervention in the health-care market. Asked to comment on the issue, even Sen. Larry Craig (R-Idaho) — touted as a hard-core conservative by the media and leftists in general — said he doesn’t think that Congress “*is ready* for any universal health-care proposal, nor do I believe the country is.” [Emphasis added.] That is politician-speak, meaning that after a few more years of rising costs, rationing, bureaucratization, and continual failure in the health-care industry — brought on by continued government interference in the health-care market in the form of regulations, licensing, mandates, price controls, Medicare, Medicaid, prescription-drug coverage, and a whole host of other government-imposed “solutions” — *then* the country, and Congress, will be “ready for a universal health-care proposal.”

America doesn’t need a “bipartisan” approach to our health-care worries. The mess we’re in is a direct result of bipartisan compromises on the issue of medical freedom. It is the responsibility of each and every American to provide for his own medical needs, by contracting for such services on the free and open market. The only effective role Congress or the president can play in any debate about health care is to accept that socialized medicine, in every form, is a failure, and to restore freedom to the health-care market.

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This article was originally published in February 2003.