The Problem

Healthcare in the United States is no longer the best in the world, at least for some citizens. As it stands, the United States is a member of an exclusive club—the highly developed nations lacking a universal health program. In fact, the United States and South Africa are the only remaining industrialized nations that fail to provide universal access to healthcare.

The U.S. does pay to provide care to certain groups, but the current system of providing limited coverage results in a huge waste of federal funds. The government subcontracts private insurance companies to provide care to these groups, which, according to the Physicians for a National Health Program, results in "a fragmentary payment system that entrusts private firms with administration, ensuring the waste of billions of dollars on useless paper pushing and profits." This money could be better spent on expanding the programs to include more uninsured.

The two programs that the government has put in place, Medicare and Medicaid, are also underwhelming in terms of the benefits they offer. While these programs do cover some medical costs, financial burdens for medical care still fall upon the patients themselves. It is easy for a person to feel cheated by these "government" programs; the money goes out in the form of taxes, but little actually gets back to those who need it for healthcare. Only a socialized, single-payer system, would efficiently redistribute the tax money fairly.

Private Insurance

For those who do not qualify for these programs and are not extraordinarily wealthy, the burden of providing care for family members is even worse. Even those who pay for insurance with premium amounts that are limited; it may not include dental care, or it may be severely restricted due to pre-existing conditions.

Many people simply go without healthcare until minor problems become emergencies, replacing cheap preventative measures with expensive emergency care and causing hospital overcharging. A national healthcare program would allow primary-care physicians to assume more of the burden.

Presidential Candidates

Presidential candidates often discuss this healthcare issue, but only those who really address the problem with a socialized system of providing care are worthy of consideration. The best platforms are those that seek to expand the Medicare and Medicaid programs while also cutting out the middlemen, the private insurers who waste money on redundant levels of administration and advertising. The best platforms also take steps to gradually shift to a socialized single-payer system, with the priority of first providing healthcare to all individuals.

Criticism

Those candidates who reject national healthcare as an option often cite the high cost of providing this care and the effect on the (heavily lobbying) insurance sector as fatal flaws in the solution. These detractors also mention the increased demand for healthcare that would inevitably occur under a universal plan.

The Truth

What these candidates fail to point out is that while taxes certainly would have to be higher, there would be no need to pay unpredictable insurance premiums or co-pays.

Rather, families would know how much they must spend on healthcare each year and would be able to budget accordingly. Under progressive taxation, the wealthier individuals would be responsible for most of the burden, while the poorest individuals would be heavily subsidized. The insurance industry would certainly lose business, but the extra productivity gained in all sectors by having a healthy workforce would be sure to preserve the solvency of the economy.

Finally, while demand for healthcare services would likely increase as uninsured individuals begin to seek care, most of the increased demand would be absorbed by the underutilized and easily expanded primary healthcare provider system. The "moral hazard" argument that people who do not have to pay for care will use it frivolously is sophist at best—just ask yourself when you last went to the dentist for a good time.

Under a universal program, people would go to the doctor when they think they need to, which is a good thing. Because our current system of providing care is so broken, we must act now to insure Americans and to ensure Americans do not have to suffer another eight years of no progress on this issue.

If steps aren’t taken to correct the current healthcare system, the United States is definitely sick.
Moving from Apathy to Involvement

by Patrick Minar

In the life of a twenty-first-century college student, there hardly seems time for anything other than schoolwork and the occasional trip to the gym in which to seek some measure of sanity.

For years, the average university student has been losing interest in politics and government—perhaps for good reason. There is a sense of growing disconnection in political circles, a film of distracted stratagems that cloaks the basic function of government. In the hands of elected officials, political unrest spurs a so-called “counter culture” movement that strives for peace, free thought, and community. In some ways, this progression succeeded, while in others, it was held back by what some would consider an overweening urge to “rebel.”

Indeed, the reforms of the 60s and 70s were countered by conservatism, and a number of other industrial and environmental organizations commit a large share of the greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, but this action means that the best-connected corporations and other organizations, typically those with the best lobbyists, get the most credits.

Some may counter that this matters very little: After all, the number of credits a company had to emit was not binding. If one organization is stopped, it will start again. It is inevitable. University presidents and other new generation who are coming into adulthood will be the catalysts for a new future. Can we hope that students and others that wish to learn more about the world around them and its politics advance their knowledge? Universities, colleges, conservatories, trade schools, and other institutions of post-secondary education offer students the chance to further their education in a chosen area, but they also provide opportunities to break from preconceived notions of politics brought about by the mass media and other unreliable sources. Simply listening to the view-points of others and replacing what is to be “believed” with original thought will lead to much progress. Now is the time to reconsider the idea of the memorable names or the idea of the English paper. The students themselves have voted? How many citizens have voted? How many citizens do only auction off a tidy profit selling excess credits? The companies, having no incentive to reduce greenhouse gases, will pollute less if the cap is set too high. What will be the consequences of these actions? What will be the impact on the environment? If the company will upgrade. This market force would work, it might be expected that the burning of the new generation is a hard lesson to learn. Instead, it confuses scientists and polluters. It is in no short supply. There are debates to be watched, articles to be read, questions to be asked—yes, even conventions to attend.

This year’s convocation series and the release of “My Election Decision” encourages educated voting and political engagement. This initiative by President Beck and others at Lawrence is a helpful step in the right direction. By this time next year, the election should be underway. The new president will be selected and the new administration will begin work. Then you submit your vote to the One Minute Left by e-mailing it to: submissions@oneminutelast.org

Thank You!

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Educate! Agitate!"