

## **Rafe Godfrey: Carmichael's 21st century Red Scare a sad attempt to mislead voters**

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I have to hand it to Sen. Mitch Carmichael on his recent op-ed, “W.Va. won’t be great through socialism.” Many politicians try to confuse and mislead voters, but few are so forthright and brazen in their attempts. He wants voters to believe prosperous countries with free-market, capitalist economies — places like Canada, all of Western Europe, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, etc. — are “failed [socialist] societies” because they have universal health care and social safety nets that work better, and more efficiently, than ours.

He wants voters to think any countries with a even a whiff of what he calls socialism (i.e., safety nets that actually function) are communist hellholes, and so are naturally much worse off than the U.S., when in fact, in myriad ways, many of those countries are doing better than we are. Carmichael not only wants voters to actually believe that the Young Democratic Socialists of America (a small, relatively fringe group) are going to “inject the poison of socialism into our education system,” but that he — yes, he, of all people — is valiantly looking out for our educators.

His op-ed is blatant button-pushing, laden with hollow buzzwords, exaggerations and outright lies. Carmichael uses the words socialist, socialists or socialism 13 times; he uses the words left or leftist four times; and the words value or values (as in, West Virginia or American values) five times. It’s a fishing trip. How many voters can he frighten into reflexively voting Republican by triggering them with words and phrases like socialism, leftist, and West Virginia values?

Ah, yes, the old, tired “West Virginia values” trope. Please, let us now dispense with this garbage. As David Mould said in his recent (and excellent) op-ed for the Gazette-Mail, family, faith, community, patriotism, personal freedoms and hard work are not uniquely West Virginian values. They are American values, period. I know this from personal experience; I lived in Chicago for five years, and have friends and family living in Chicago, D.C. and New York. People in big cities value these things every bit as much as we do.

Coming back to socialism, Carmichael clearly wants voters to equate the more robust social safety nets of the aforementioned countries with Soviet-era communism and poverty, repression, inefficiency and dictatorial government.

Carmichael writes, “Many of these ‘free’ government programs are the policies of failed societies.” (He neglects, of course, to actually name a single one of these “free government programs,” so we’ll use the example of universal health care.) Because, the unstated assumption

goes, our privatized health care system means more economic freedom! I mean, the U.S. has the freest economy on Earth, right? Well, according to a 2018 report from the Heritage Foundation — a conservative think tank — the country with the highest degree of economic freedom in the world is Hong Kong. Wait, what? OK, but followed by the U.S., right? Nope. The U.S. ranked 18th, one spot ahead of Lithuania.

OK, but how about personal freedom? Carmichael refers to the “failed policies of socialism ... [expanding] government into our lives.” Well, we can’t have that, because we in America enjoy unparalleled personal liberty! Right? Well, according to the 2017 Human Freedom Index from the Cato Institute — a Libertarian think tank — the three countries on Earth with the greatest personal freedom are ... Switzerland, Hong Kong and New Zealand? What?! ‘Fraid so. The U.S. isn’t even in the top 10; we’re ranked 17th.

Still, Carmichael doesn’t slow his roll: “National government-run programs will be inefficient and unable to provide services to the very people they are supposed to help.” Really? Because, in a 2000 report from the World Health Organization that ranked the overall performance of the health care systems of all 191 member states based on an index of five factors (including per-capita cost, attainment of health goals, and overall level of health), America ranked 37th, which puts us just ahead of Slovenia. That’s right, our health care system didn’t even rank in the top 30. The country with the best overall system? France — one of those countries with “inefficient, government-run” health care.

But don’t worry, the U.S. did rank first in one metric: Per-capita spending on health care. And, when ranked based on performance by level of health, America finished an abysmal 72nd. Carmichael recently remarked, “I don’t think the people of West Virginia or America want universal health care.” I personally think the people of the Mountain State would be open to considering a system that not only costs far less per capita than ours, but performs far better.

Clearly, Sen. Carmichael desperately wants voters to not only misunderstand what socialism is (spoiler: having universal health care does not make a country socialist), but also to believe that any country with universal health care and a working safety net is destitute, dysfunctional, inefficient and authoritarian — when, in fact, the overwhelming majority of research shows the opposite.

But Carmichael moves from merely desperate to actually insulting when he says, “Republicans have worked with teachers to raise their salaries,” and later, “Republicans delivered the largest total pay raise in history for our teachers.” To use the words of Gov. Justice, this is “bull you-know-what.”

Republicans didn’t *deliver* anything; teachers went out and *won* a raise, in spite of concerted Republican efforts to stop them. In fact, the state GOP adamantly opposed anything beyond a 1 percent raise, and only acquiesced when it became obvious that public opinion wasn’t with them. And none other than Carmichael himself was the leader of this opposition. (Which makes Carmichael like Hillary Clinton, who opposed raising the minimum wage in Seattle, but, when the measure passed, took the stage and proclaimed, “We did it!”)

And now, the West Virginia GOP is worried that when voters look at the ballot in November, they’ll understand and remember all of this quite clearly. Carmichael undoubtedly took note of

the absolute pasting that pro-teacher, pro-union Republican Bill Hamilton gave to Robert Karnes in the GOP's 11th senatorial district primary, and he's scared, plain and simple. He should be.

Because as much as his Twitter rants and op-eds may energize his base, they'll energize teachers and pro-union West Virginians that much more. Carmichael and the West Virginia GOP are making a laughably pathetic attempt at a 21st century Red Scare. Voters, however, are seeing right through their smoke.