

Matt Yglesias

Today at 9:58 am

Medicare is Still a Government Program



Whether or not you like the idea of a Canadian-style single-payer health care system, there's no question that we already have such a system here in the United States. The Canadians call their system "Medicare" and it's open to all citizens. We call our version of Medicare "Medicare" and it's open to all citizens over the age of 65. In Medicare, like in Medicare, medical services are provided by the private sector but the costs are substantially born by a government-run insurance program. Medicare in Canada has problems, but it's very popular and Canadians show little sign of wanting it to change. Medicare in the United States also has problems, but it's also very popular and senior citizens show little sign of wanting it to change. Older Americans are also [generally skeptical of Barack Obama](#) and thus plagued by anxiety that he's going to somehow curtail their access to generous government-provided health insurance.

Alternatively, you could act like the Cato Institute's Doug Bandow and treat [AARP members' skepticism](#) as a sign of incipient libertarianism:

[In Dallas, at least, the AARP staff found it tough going attempting to explain](#) to the organization's members why the elderly would be better off with Obama-like "reform." **These people obviously were having trouble with the line, "I'm from the government and I'm here to help you."** And they were quite vocal in stating their concerns. But they were acting well within the American political tradition, which seems to be what has **spooked advocates of a government medical takeover** speaking breathlessly of "mobs"—presumably like the one in Dallas—opposing "reform."

I'm sure they did have trouble explaining because there are people like Bandow out there deliberately confusing the situation. But, again, senior citizens are *already experiencing government-run health insurance*. And they like it. They love it! They're nervous that it might change. And their fears are being stoked by a right-wing campaign of deception. But they're certainly not clamoring for a Cato-style agenda in which the government stops giving them health insurance.

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Filed under: [Cato Institute](#), [Health Care](#),

16 Responses to “Medicare is Still a Government Program”

1. *DTM* Says:

[August 7th, 2009 at 10:02 am](#)

I guess we can now add Medicare along with the U.S. Armed Forces to the list of things that don't actually count as government for the purpose of anti-government philosophies.

2. *Why oh why* Says:

[August 7th, 2009 at 10:12 am](#)

Must-read on health care “reform”:

The Health Insurers Have Already Won

http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/09_33/b4143034820260.htm

An exposee on the dangerous influence of lobbyists by... Business Week.

3. *JH* Says:

[August 7th, 2009 at 10:14 am](#)

The last 3 or 4 months of American public life have been so. fucking. infuriating, even by the already abysmal standards I set for it.

4. *Brad* Says:

[August 7th, 2009 at 10:18 am](#)

It is ridiculous to see certain conservatives demagogue potential Medicare changes, considering many of them want to make cuts, privatize it or don't support the concept to begin with.

5. *Danton* Says:

[August 7th, 2009 at 10:30 am](#)

About a third of my family lives in Canada. The only health care complaints I've ever heard from them arise when they're visiting us here in the US. Yes, they may have to wait a month or six weeks for non-threatening procedures. No, they do not wait at all for any health matter that even has the appearance of something serious.

If our “system” was better, I think Canadians and people in other countries would be clamoring for a “US-style” health care system. Oddly, I don't hear such commotion in our press, in the foreign press, or when I travel abroad.

6. *anon* Says:

[August 7th, 2009 at 10:45 am](#)

I'm mystified as to how reporters are letting themselves be convinced that old people are so worried about a government takeover of healthcare that they're screaming loonies at town halls.

People are lying to them that the crazed Democrats are going to kill them. And the media is credulously reporting these charges—because, apparently, they are convinced Charlie Rangel and Harry Waxman think euthanasia is the way to close the deficit. Clearly, they are seeing a side of these two that is a shocking, goose-stepping departure from their entire political careers.

And please, let's not suggest that “advocates of a government medical takeover [are] speaking breathlessly of ‘mobs’” Everyone knows that the things single-payer advocates—the people who are, in fact, the closest thing this nation has to advocates of a government medical takeover—the things they say are not covered in the media. At all. Nobody's reporting what they say, much less reporting on the things they are “breathlessly” saying.

The town halls are people opposed to a government takeover screaming at people who are ALSO opposed to a government takeover that we shouldn't let government takeover healthcare. Oh, and the zealots scream we should get rid of Medicare (it's unconstitutional, you know), and they scream about immigrants and birth certificates and they tell American-born people who aren't white to “go back to your own country” but that gets edited out for some reason.

And when the actual advocates of a government takeover actually show up—which they have done for decades—THEY ARE INVISIBLE.

7. *beowulf* Says:

[August 7th, 2009 at 10:47 am](#)

I think its time to for Obama to stop trying to ram through his risky, government takeover of health care and instead work for incremental changes that the American people can support.

Like John Conyers's plan to expand and improve Medicare.

8. *joe from Lowell* Says:

[August 7th, 2009 at 10:54 am](#)

Is the lesson here that the Democrats need to push for Medicare for All in order to keep the geezers on board?

9. *riffle* Says:

[August 7th, 2009 at 10:56 am](#)

STOP MEDICARE!
Medicare is Socialized Medicine!

National Rally Against Medicare.

<http://www.stopmedicare.org/>

10. *windshouter* Says:

[August 7th, 2009 at 11:16 am](#)

This post is the start of a book called libertarian socialism, right? Let's see, you're more likely to be a libertarian if you believe in your own ability to protect what you have and view the government as a threat to that. It could easily be viewed that entitlements themselves are goods that could be protected from (more) government interference, so you could completely rely on government and at the same time oppose changes that threaten other patterns of redistribution. I don't know how you work in the fact that one of the goals of the movement is to preserve medicare and the other goal is to eliminate it.

Likely not a stable alliance.

11. *rapier* Says:

[August 7th, 2009 at 11:23 am](#)

Next time there is a townhall or a tea party just go carrying a sign, END MEDICARE NOW.

12. *rapier* Says:

[August 7th, 2009 at 11:32 am](#)

Obviously I should read a thread before posting. I strongly support End Medicare Now.

13. *sunsin* Says:

[August 7th, 2009 at 11:33 am](#)

If our “system” was better, I think Canadians and people in other countries would be clamoring for a “US-style” health care system.

A few do, but they mostly consist of a minority of greedy doctors who want a free hand to ream out their patients, and shills for insurance companies with like motives.

By the way, even in Canada where their medical role is so restricted, insurance companies can’t resist screwing their clients over when they can. My local pharmacy has a sign posted that it will no longer fill orders for any compounded product (ointments, lotions, and the like) that is billed to a private plan rather than the public one, since the private insurers so often go back on their word to pay up.

14. *Rob Mac* Says:

[August 7th, 2009 at 11:38 am](#)

This is exactly why the entire health care reform push should have been packaged as a Medicare expansion. None of the geezers would have been against it. Medicare for all children up to age 18. Gradually expand that to 26. Push down the minimum age requirement from 65 to 60 and then to 55.

Before you know it, there’s only a 30 year window in which people aren’t covered by Medicare. It’s pretty easy to argue that that is unfair. Allow anyone in that age group to buy in to Medicare if they don’t have employer-provided health insurance. Then start allowing employers to buy into Medicare, or to transition their employees to individual Medicare plans.

Before you know it, universal single payer.

15. *brewmn* Says:

[August 7th, 2009 at 11:51 am](#)

“These people obviously were having trouble with the line, “I’m from the government and I’m here to help you.” ”

Reagan killed our country. Bush II just nailed the coffin shut.

16. *NS* Says:

[August 7th, 2009 at 11:54 am](#)

Of course they would still be against it. Their fear is that if you throw open the gates and let everyone get in, the quality of their care and access will suffer.

This is the generation that would nearly abandon a city after someone with the wrong color of skin moved across the wrong street. It's the generation that flipped en masse from Lyndon Johnson to Ronald Reagan after too many "others" got access to the social safety net. "Keeping others from taking my stuff," is a motivating factor here.

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