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## **Absent Conversation in Media: Why Did GOP Reaffirm Health Insurance as a Right?**

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Recently crowned Miss USA, Kara McCullough, created a firestorm with one simple comment. When asked if health care was a right or a privilege, McCullough gave the free-market response: *“I’m definitely going to say it’s a privilege.”*

McCullough wasn’t done. She linked health insurance to employment. “As a government employee, I am granted health care, and I see firsthand that for one to have health care, you need to have a job. Therefore, we need to continue to cultivate this environment that we’re given the opportunities to have health care as well as jobs to all the American citizens worldwide,” she explained.

Critics lambasted McCullough for her remarks. She has already backed down from that position, shrinking from the attacks. But her comments bring up an essential question. With recent passage of the American Health Care Act (AHCA) in the House of Representatives on May 5, there is virtually no media discussion about one of the most fundamental aspects of the health care debate – is health insurance a right?

Journalists have discussed virtually every other aspect of health insurance, but not this most fundamental piece. They have called passage of the AHCA a political disaster for the GOP. They have called the AHCA inhumane, and falsely claimed it was passed without any text to guide the vote. And forget any pretense of objectivity. The network news stations have slammed passage of the bill with glib platitudes and facile liberal talking points. The media discussion is one-sided and filled with hyperbole, outrage, and outright lies.

But the discussion about the role the government should play in health care is a critically important one. The media need to present all sides of it and present it fairly. They don’t.

To be fair, Republicans, and conservatives to a lesser degree, enable this superficial discussion. Hill Republicans are so hell bent on passing something, anything, to score political points, they neglect to discuss the essential issue of what the U.S. government must provide.

Democrats targeted Paul Ryan and the GOP during the 2012 elections as the evil party which would push grandma off the cliff. Now, Republicans are fearful of being tarred again in such a way. That fear is no excuse for neglecting to do the right thing and boldly discussing the best

path forward. With passage of the house version of the AHCA May 5, Congress has seemingly reaffirmed a “right” to health care by maintaining many of the provisions of Obamacare.

Under the new bill people would still receive the subsidies that they did under Obamacare, which would phase out at incomes of \$75,000 per year. And though the plan would allow states to seek waivers from several consumer protections, it would not explicitly eliminate guaranteed coverage. In other words, conservative critics are right. The new health care bill is indeed Obamacare Light.

As Michael Tanner of the Cato Institute points out, health care costs are skyrocketing in the U.S., and Obamacare is in large part to blame. The Government has projected the health share of the economy will continue its historical upward trend, reaching 19 percent by the end of this year. This is a trend which obviously cannot continue forever.

And yet this is precisely the road we will go down if we continue to treat health care as a right. What we need is fundamental reform, not Obamacare Light. A free-market alternative is a viewpoint the media should discuss. There are plenty of sources to draw upon for such a conversation. Scholars from the Heritage Foundation, AEI, and the National Center for Public Policy Research lay out viable, free market alternatives which will increase the quality, affordability and supply of health care.

These are solid, sober, well thought out proposals which deserve a fair hearing.

Health care not only affects the physical well being of our citizens, but also has a dramatic effect on our economy. The Media have a duty to provide all angles on this most important topic and let the American people decide the correct way forward. If they don't, they are guilty of journalistic malfeasance in one of the most important policy areas we face in our time.