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David Frum Would Respect Libertarians More if They'd Quit Worrying About Calorie Labeling and Talk About Medicare Reform

Peter Suderman | December 27, 2010

On the Twitter machine, David Frum, whose response to the passage of ObamaCare was to scold Republicans for not playing along with liberal reformers, now says he'd "respect libertarians much more if they'd propose Medicare reforms instead of grousing about calorie counts on menus." And you know what? Maybe libertarians should start paying a little more attention to Medicare—and, yes, perhaps even talking about reform, tough as that may be.

I know, I know. This would represent a radical departure for many libertarians, who as a cohort have failed to make entitlement reform a priority. After all, it's not as if anyone at this particular libertarian publication has repeatedly praised elected officials like Rand Paul and Paul Ryan for talking about reforming Medicare. Come to think of it, libertarians haven't defended the idea of voucherizing the program or examined bipartisan plans to do so. Nor have libertarians argued in favor of consumer-driven health care or supported folks proposing consumer-driven reforms.



Neither has anyone here written about how competitive HMOs might serve as an antidote to Medicare's central-pricing woes, or why we ought to free doctors from the system's federal pricing caps.

And by golly no one at *Reason* has ever, ever excoriated Republican leadership or Tea Party activists for their timidity regarding making Medicare reform a priority.

Nor can you really say that libertarians have any history of concern about Medicare, or interest in designing plans to keep the system from imploding. This magazine, for example, made no reference to the need to defuse America's ticking entitlement time bomb in 2003. And no, the fine folks at The Cato Institute weren't proposing ways to avert serious fiscal problems within the program back in 1985, or pushing patient-centered reforms in the early days of the Clinton presidency. And oddly enough, it seems our wonky friends at The Mercatus Center have ignored the looming Medicare crisis and proposals for reform as well. How strange!

What has been going on? What can explain this oversight? I do not know for sure. But clearly, Medicare reform is one of those little-noticed public policy issues that, for whatever reason, just hasn't managed to penetrate the libertarian consciousness. And perhaps most of the world's libertarians were simply too distracted by mandatory calorie labeling to notice it.