



Washington has no hope of fixing our health care system

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As America begins to talk about the pandemic in the past tense, it seems like a good time to look at how Americans view our nation's health care system.

A survey of 1,000 registered voters that I conducted last week found that 48% of voters rate our health care system today as good or excellent. Thirty-one percent (31%) say it is just fair and 19% rate the health care system as poor (for survey details, visit ScottRasmussen.com).

Unusual in today's world is the lack of a massive partisan divide. Among those who are Republicans or lean Republican, 51% rate the system as good or excellent. Of those who are Democrats or lean toward the Democrats, 49% say the same. Among the smaller group with no partisan leaning, 36% agree.

Still, the data suggests there is a lot of confusion on the topic leading to mixed assessments. For example, despite the fact that 48% say the health care system is good or excellent, 67% say it is badly broken (these results come from the same survey and the same group of 1,000 registered voters). Even half (50%) of those who rate the system as good or excellent also say it is badly broken.

On top of that, among those who believe the health care system is badly broken, 66% say they personally receive good or excellent care. Overall, among all voters, 71% rate the medical care they receive as good or excellent. How can that be? Most likely, it's because even those who receive great personal care have to put up with the frustration of a health care bureaucracy that interferes with the patient-doctor relationship.

There's another layer of confusion created by the fact that a solid plurality of voters (45%) believe we have a free-market health care system. In reality, however, a Cato Institute analysis of data from the Center for Medicare and Medicaid services found that government sources control 83% of all health care spending.

- That total includes the fact that 46% of all health care spending comes directly from government sources. That's far more than any other source of funding for the industry.

- Another 37% of funding comes from spending supported indirectly through substantial tax preferences. Broadly speaking, this includes all employer provided health insurance. The only way to get the tax break is to provide the insurance mandated by the government. Cato calls this “spending subject to government coercion.”

Where does this leave us?

America has a health care system that provides good or adequate care for the vast majority. Only 8% rate the medical care they receive as poor. At the same time, there is a widespread recognition that the system is broken. Whether it's government bureaucrats or insurance company bureaucrats following government rules, we have an army of people interfering with the relationship between patient and doctor.

We also have two major obstacles to reform. First, there is a significant misunderstanding of how our system works. Only 34% recognize that we have a government run health care system.

An even bigger obstacle to reform is the fact that 7 out of 10 voters are happy with the care they receive. For them, there is little upside to reform and plenty of downside. No matter how bad the health care system is today, there is a rational concern that Congress could make it worse.

Therefore, when you look at health care from a purely political perspective, there is no hope of fixing our broken health care system. Fortunately, we don't have to depend upon a political solution. We live in a nation where almost all positive change begins far outside of the political realm. The reforms we need will come from innovations in America rather than legislation in Washington.