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A CALL FOR PARTICIPATION

The Connection is an open conversation, a group blog, and a nonpartisan effort to spark a rich discourse on fundamental values in health reform. Anyone can submit a post, and a selection of posts will appear here, on the Health Affairs blog, and in an upcoming volume.

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11.6.09

Why Freedom Is the Key to Health Care Reform

[Michael F. Cannon](#) | From [The Cato Institute](#)

The following was delivered as a speech to the Freedom Fest in Kansas City, MO on September 5 2009.

Why is it important to talk about health care at a rally for freedom?

Well, about 100 years ago, the government said it would ensure high-quality doctors. What they did was take away our freedom to get low-cost routine care from nurses and other clinicians, as well as our freedom to choose different types of health systems. In place of that freedom, they gave us higher health care costs, and lower quality medical care.

Then the government said it would ensure high-quality health insurance. What they did was take away our freedom to purchase health insurance from outside our own state. In place of that freedom, they allowed special interests to drive up the cost of health insurance with hidden taxes and coverage that we don't want or need.

Then the government said it would make health insurance more affordable. Instead, they took away your freedom to control your earnings, choose your health plan, and buy secure health coverage. You know that \$9,000 that your employer uses to pay for your family policy? It isn't your employer's money. It's your money. But the government gave it to your employer. In place of the freedom to control our earnings and choose our health plan, the government gave us higher costs and health insurance that disappears the moment we get sick and can't work anymore.

The government said it would make prescription drugs and medical devices safe and effective. What they did was take away your freedom to choose your course of medical treatment. And what took the place of your freedom? Every study that's ever been done has found that we would save lives if government stopped regulating drugs so heavily.

The government said it would provide health care to the elderly. What they did was take away your freedom to save for and choose your own health plan in retirement. In place of that freedom, they gave us the Medicare program, which has cost far more than projected, and is the main reason why costs are so high. Medicare has required one tax increase every four years — and it's still \$80 trillion in the hole. As for quality, Medicare is the single largest reason that medical errors kill as many as 100,000 Americans each year. And it took Medicare at least *ten years* to improve mortality rates — if it has improved mortality at all, which remains an open question.

Finally, the government said it would provide health care to the poor. What they did was take away your freedom to provide charitable care as you see fit. In place of that freedom, they gave us government programs that provide medical care to millions of people who could afford it themselves. Your bill for those programs is more than \$1,000 a year.

And now that government has:

- Taken away so much of our freedom,
- Reduced our health insurance choices and choice of providers,
- Driven health care costs skyward,
- Pushed quality downward,
- Given us health insurance that disappears when our jobs disappear, and
- Saddled us with entitlement programs that will cause income-tax rates to double by mid-century...

Now President Obama comes to us and says: *Give me just a little more of your freedom, and I'll make it all better. Let me force you to purchase health insurance. Let me decide what you'll buy and use price controls to set the premiums. Let me add to your tax burden with yet another failing government program. Let government bureaucrats decide whether you and your loved ones get the treatment you want.*

We can achieve so much, the president beams. All I need is just a little more of your freedom.

We've seen what the president wants to achieve. Politicians have already taken those freedoms away from the people of Massachusetts. And what did they get in return? Health insurance premiums are rising 40 percent faster than the national average. Waits to see a specialist are getting longer. And politicians are raising taxes like mad. All because it costs government almost twice as much to cover the uninsured as it costs the free market.

President Obama is not offering better, more affordable health care. He is offering us more of the same.

I sincerely believe that President Obama is a good man. But I propose we say, *No thank you, Mr. President. We're not going to trade in any more of our freedom. In fact, we'd like some of our freedoms back:*

- *Like the freedom to choose low-cost providers like nurse practitioners, and low-cost health systems,*
- *The freedom to control our earnings and choose our own health plans,*
- *The freedom to purchase health insurance across state lines, which could by itself cover 17 million uninsured Americans without costing taxpayers a dime,*
- *The freedom to choose our course of treatment with the advice of doctors we trust, and*
- *The freedom to provide medical care to the needy as we see fit.*

Some will tell you: *You don't want those freedoms, those freedoms are dangerous.* And you know what? They're right.

To an insurance company that doesn't honor its commitments, your freedom is dangerous. To a hospital that overcharges its patients, your freedom is dangerous. To the politicians, government bureaucrats, and special interests who play upon our fears to increase their power, your freedom is dangerous.

We have surrendered so much of our freedom that it's no wonder one-third of U.S. health care spending — more than 5 percent of GDP — is completely wasted.

When we reclaim these freedoms, we will see an explosion of innovation that will make health care better and more affordable for everyone — especially the needy.

When we reclaim these freedoms, we will become a healthier nation, a wealthier nation, and most importantly, a freer nation.

value: [Freedom](#)

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