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Michael F. Cannon, Cato, Dir. of Health Policy Studies:
Newt Gingrich Takes a Bold Stand against Information *

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Conservatives and Republicans need a better way to talk about cost-containment than the typical anti-comparative-effectiveness-research argument advanced (most recently) by **Newt Gingrich** in *The Economist*.

The Economist asked Gingrich to defend the motion:

This house believes that the widespread use of comparative effectiveness reviews and cost/benefit analyses will stifle medical innovation and lead to an unacceptable rationing of health care.

On its face, that motion is absurd and indefensible. *Of course* comparative-effectiveness reviews and cost-benefit analyses would limit medical innovation and enable rationing. And thank goodness. If we didn't limit medical innovation or ration medical care, we would spend 100 percent of GDP on medical care and there would be no money left over for shoes and ships and sealing wax, or food, education, and the internet. Another word for "**comparative-effectiveness research**" or "cost-effectiveness studies" is "information." Such research produces information that helps people limit medical innovation and ration medical care in the

best possible way.

Yet Gingrich took the bait. He pooh-poohs comparative-effectiveness research and even describes it as “dangerous” – at the same time he assumes knowledge that only research can provide (e.g., “smaller groups [of patients] may have responded best to drug X, Y, or Z”).

What Gingrich actually opposes is *government rationing*. And with good reason: people get hurt when government rations care, because government’s one-size-fits-all rules cannot take patients’ unique physiologies and preferences into account.

The public knows that, and the Left knows that they know it. The Left therefore tries to distract attention from the question “Who decides?”, and instead shifts the debate to the question, “Do we want better information?”

Gingrich and many others have fallen right into that trap. Gingrich should have rejected the above motion as absurd and **attacked government rationing** head-on. Instead, he portrays information (!) as a dark and sinister force.

If that’s the approach conservatives and Republicans take, then they deserve to lose the health care debate.

*Cross posted at [Cato@Liberty](#)

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