

Appendix VII

Socialized Medicine

Transcript of Private Citizen Ronald Reagan's 1961 Remarks on Socialized Medicine

From the 1961 Operation Coffee Cup Campaign against Socialized Medicine as proposed by the Democrats. Then a private citizen, Ronald Reagan spoke out against socialized medicine. The text is from an LP sent out by the American Medical Association.

“Back in 1927, an American Socialist, Norman Thomas six-times candidate for President on the Socialist Party ticket, said the American people would never vote for Socialism, but he said that under the name of liberalism the American people would adopt every fragment of the Socialist program. There are many ways in which our government has invaded the precincts of private citizens, the method of earning a living. Our government is in business to the extent of owning more than 19,000 businesses covering 47 different lines of activity. This amounts to one-fifth of the total industrial capacity of the United States.

But at the moment I would like to talk about another way because this threat is with us and at the moment is more imminent. **One of the traditional methods of imposing statism or socialism on a people has been by way of medicine. It is very easy to disguise a medical program as a humanitarian project. Most people are a little reluctant to oppose anything that suggests medical care for people who possibly can't afford it.**

Now, the American people if you put it to them about socialized medicine and gave them a chance to choose would unhesitatingly vote against it. We have an example of this. Under the Truman administration, it was proposed that we have a compulsory health insurance program for all people in the United States. And of course, the American people unhesitatingly rejected this.

So, with the American people on record as not wanting socialized medicine, Congressman Forand introduced the Forand bill. This was the idea that all people of Social Security age should be brought under a program of compulsory health insurance. Now this would not only be our senior citizens, this would be their dependents and those who are disabled, this would be young people if they are dependents of someone eligible for social security.

Now Congressman Forand brought the program out on that idea, of just for that particular group of people. But Congressman Forand was subscribing to this foot in the door philosophy because he said: “If we can only break through and get our foot inside the door, then we can expand the program after that.”

Walter Reuther said that: “It's no secret that the United Automobile Workers is officially on record as backing a program of national health insurance.” And by national health insurance, he meant socialized medicine for every American.

Now let's see what the socialists themselves have to say about it. They say once the Forand bill is passed, this nation will be provided with a mechanism for socialized medicine capable of indefinite expansion in every direction until it includes the entire population.

Well we can't say we haven't been warned. Now, Congressman Forand is no longer a Congressman of the United States government. He has been replaced, not in his particular assignment, but in his backing of such a bill by Congressman King of California. It is presented in the idea of a great emergency — that millions of our senior citizens are unable to provide needed medical care. But this ignores the fact that in the last decade 127 million of our citizens — in just 10 years — have come under the protection of some form of privately owned medical or hospital insurance.

Now the advocates of this bill when you try to oppose it, challenge you on an emotional basis. They say: “What would you do, throw these poor old people out to die with no medical attention.” That's ridiculous and, of course, no one is advocating it.

As a matter of fact, in the last session of Congress a bill was adopted known as the Kerr-Mills bill. Now without even allowing this bill to be tried to see if it works, they have introduced this King bill which is really the Forand bill.

What is the Kerr-Mills bill? It is a frank recognition of the medical need or problem of the senior citizens that I have mentioned. And it is provided from the federal government, money to the states and the local communities that can be used at the discretion of the states to help those people who need it. Now what reason could the other people have for backing a bill which says we insist on compulsory health insurance for senior citizens on the basis of age alone, regardless of whether they are worth millions of dollars, whether they have an income, whether they're protected by their own insurance, whether they have savings. I think we can be excused for believing, that as ex-Congressman Forand said, this was simply an excuse to bring about what they wanted all the time — socialized medicine.

James Madison, 1788, speaking to the Virginia Convention said:

“Since the general civilization of mankind, I believe there are more instances of the abridgement of the freedom of the people by gradual and silent encroachment of those in power than by violent or sudden usurpations.”

They want to attach this bill to Social Security, and they say here is a great insurance program, now instituted, now working. Let's take a look at Social Security itself. Again, very few of us disagree with the original premise that there should be some form of savings that would keep destitution from following unemployment by reason of death, disability, or old age. And to this end Social Security was adopted, but it was never intended to supplant private savings, private insurance, pension programs, and unions and industries.

Now in our country, under our free enterprise system, we have seen medicine reach the greatest heights that it has in any country in the world. Today, the relationship between patient and doctor in this country is something to be envied any place — the privacy, the care that is given to a person, the right to choose a doctor, the right to go from one doctor to the other.

But let's also look from the other side, at the freedom the doctor loses. A doctor would be reluctant to say this. Well, like you, I'm only a patient, so I can say it in his behalf. The doctor begins to lose freedoms. It's like telling a lie, and one leads to another. First you decide that the doctor can have so many patients, they're equally divided among the various doctors by the government. But then the doctors aren't equally divided geographically. So, a doctor decides he wants to practice in one town and the government has to say to him, “You can't live in that town, they already have enough doctors you have to go someplace else.” And from here it's only a short step to dictating where he will go.

This is a freedom that I wonder whether any of us have the right to take from any human being. I know how I'd feel if you, my fellow citizens, decided that to be an actor I had to become a government employee and work in a national theater. Take it into your own occupation, or that of your husband, all of us can see what happens once you establish the precedent that the government can determine a man's working place, and his working methods, determine his employment. From here it's a short step to all the rest of socialism, to determining his pay, and pretty soon your son won't decide when he's in school where he will go or what he will do for a living, he will wait for the government to tell him where he will go to work and what he will do.

In this country of ours took place the greatest revolution that has ever taken place in the world's history — the only true revolution. Every other revolution simply exchanged one set of rulers for another. But here for the first time in all the thousands of years of man's relation to man, a little group of men — the Founding Fathers — for the first time, established the idea that you and I have within ourselves the Godgiven right and ability to determine our own destiny.

This freedom was built into our government with safeguards. We talk democracy today and strangely we let democracy begin to assume the aspect of majority rule is all that is needed. Well majority rule is a fine aspect of democracy — provided there are guarantees written in to our government concerning the rights of the individual and of the minorities.

What can we do about this? Well you and I can do a great deal. We can write to our Congressmen, to our Senators. We can say right now that we want no further encroachment on these individual liberties and freedoms. And at the moment, the key issue is — we do not want socialized medicine.

In Washington today, 40,000 letters, less than a hundred per Congressman, are evidence of a trend in public thinking. Representative Halleck of Indiana has said: “When the American people want something from Congress, regardless of its political complexion, if they make their wants known, Congress does what the people want.” So, write!

And if this man writes back to you and tells you that he too is for free enterprise, but we have these great services and so forth that must be performed by government, don’t let him get away with it. Show that you have not been convinced. Write a letter right back, and tell him that you believe in government economy and fiscal responsibility. That you know that governments don’t tax to get the money they need, governments will always find a need for the money they get. And that you demand the continuation of our traditional free enterprise system.

You and I can do this. The only way we can do it, is by writing to our Congressmen, even if we believe that he’s on our side to begin with. Write to strengthen his hand. Give him the ability to stand before his colleagues in Congress and say I have heard from my constituents and this is what they want.

Write those letters now. Call your friends and tell them to write. If you don’t, this program I promise you will pass just as surely as the sun will come up tomorrow. And behind it will come other federal programs that will invade every area of freedom as we have known it in this country until, one day, as Norman Thomas said, we will awake to find that we have socialism. And if you don’t do this, and if I don’t do it, one of these days you and I are going to spend our sunset years telling our children, and our children’s children, what it once was like in American when men were free.”

To hear the audio file go to: www.theccwr.org/ReaganResolve.html#audio