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Summary

Three state lawmakers have turned the philosophy of individual rights on its head by declaring that all Oregonians have a fundamental right to health care.

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“The right to life, for example, does not mean that someone has to provide you with food and water; it means that you are free to work to earn your food and water and others may not steal them from you once you have them.”

“Right” to health care violates individual rights

by *Michael Barton, Ph.D.*

In an April 12 guest opinion piece for the state’s largest newspaper, three state lawmakers argued for establishing “affordable and effective health care” as a fundamental right for every Oregonian.

But what Rep. Mitch Greenlick, D-Portland, gubernatorial candidate Sen. Ben Westlund, I-Tumalo, and Sen. Alan Bates, D-Ashland, are really advocating is a new, massive entitlement program where the state government, the taxpayers, should somehow be made responsible to provide health care for all.

Presumably these elected officials chose to use the language of rights rather than entitlements because “rights” are popular while “entitlements” have earned a negative reputation.

Our rights define what we are free to do without interference. In the Declaration of Independence the founders list life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness as among our inalienable rights.

Notice that these rights are not goods or services, not housing or health care, not education or food. The right to life, for example, does not mean that someone has to provide you with food and water; it means that you are free to work to earn your food and water and others may not steal them from you once you have them.

Having these rights mean we are free to live our lives in any way that does not interfere with the rights of others; we may pursue happiness, but are not guaranteed it.

The founders understood that rights are intrinsic (“endowed by their Creator” was their phrase); they belong to the people and cannot be given or taken away by the government. The principle function of government is to recognize and secure these rights, rights that are paid for by the lives and struggles of those who established and fought for our independence and freedom.

Entitlements, on the other hand, are obligations placed on one group of people to pay for benefits to another group.

The benefits called for in this so-called “Hope for Oregon Families” proposal are seemingly quite substantial if these lawmakers are to be believed.

It is claimed the new system will improve the health of every Oregonian. Implausibly, it is to accomplish this extraordinary feat while conserving the existing health care system, and also at the same time encouraging greater individual responsibility!

The costs? The authors shamefully duck that question, writing that, “Nothing in the Hope initiative will raise taxes.”

What that means is merely that the initiative itself does not contain a tax increase. Certainly, however, the cost of setting up and operating a vast new bureaucracy intended to improve the health of every Oregonian will run to uncounted millions, or more probably billions of dollars. How could it not?

Westlund, Greenlick and Bates don’t want you to think about that, though. They’re interested only in discussing the supposed benefits the masses will somehow enjoy simply by declaring health care to be a “fundamental right.”

This is the politics of wishful thinking. Wouldn’t it be great if everyone had health care? Let’s call it a right! How about good housing, or adequate food? What problem could not be solved simply by inventing a new right?

The same question needs to be asked in every case: Paid for by whom? Which victim is to be sacrificed to provide this so-called new right? What these three politicians are proposing is not to protect our rights, but to violate the rights of some people in order to benefit others.

There is a lot that is wrong with our health care system and most of it stems from government interference, past and present. The solution lies in the direction of more individual freedom and choice, not in turning the whole system over to the government.

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