

Bernie's Universal Healthcare

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"Here in America... we take the injunction to live free or die very literally."

- [Heather Gilligan](#)

The United States is [one of only 43 countries](#) in the world that does not offer free or universal healthcare, and no amount of debate in Congress seems to move the needle forward. Universal Healthcare has been discussed in the US as early as the beginning of the 20th century, with strong debate inspired by the Soviet Union's introduction of a Medicare program. A plethora of countries around the world responded with their own version of universal healthcare – except the US. Lobbying from organized medical practitioners and political elites has gridlocked chances for real change in this country, and even though the US spends more money per capita on healthcare than any country in the world, it boasts one of the developed world's worst healthcare systems.

Fervent opposition to such a program is associated with a fear of its assumed connection to socialism. With such strong faith and alliance to capitalism, American political elites portray any form of government-run medicine as inefficient and unrealistic. Yet, other countries have adopted universal health care programs as a means of [combatting movements of socialism](#) in the nation, with [many European countries introducing government-run insurance system](#) to stabilize their economies, and protect against wage loss during sickness. Conservative-leaning parties in the UK and Germany have expanded health care benefits to counter the expansion of socialist parties, and to buy political allegiance among the working class. Why has the US resisted this approach, and why is this resistance so strong?

The resistance consistently cites a threat to American freedom and healthcare efficiency, and is supported by opposition from the medical and insurance communities. Universal healthcare has faced opposition [as early as 1913](#), because it was viewed as a threat to the liberty of unions. FDR chose to leave universal healthcare out of the New Deal in 1935 because he feared that opposition thereto would upend his broad agenda. Harry Truman's presidency led the greatest strides in a campaign for a national health insurance program, as he strongly advocated for his [National Health Bill](#), a system that individuals would pay into monthly to cover all medical expenses in addition to wage recovery in the event of sickness. with The [Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill](#), a modified version of this program was reintroduced in congress every session for 15 consecutive years. The opposition to such efforts in 1946 [were valued at \\$1.5 million dollars spent by the Republican Party](#) – at the time the largest amount of money spent on lobbying efforts in American history. These lobbying efforts consisted of conflating a national insurance program with the socialist state instituted in countries abroad that were falling to communism, namely Lenin's Russia.

Today, Universal Healthcare has gained more attention thanks in part to the [Medicare for All](#) caucus, which was officially formed by 70 congress members, led by efforts by its greatest champion: Bernie Sanders. Of [the 27 democratic primary candidates](#) that declared a position on the issue, 10 were explicitly in support of Medicare for All, while 17 others opposed it but would support expanding public coverage. In a poll done in 2018, [70% of Americans](#) surveyed supported Medicare for All legislation. Why is the electoral narrative misrepresentative of this?

The fear of such a policy among lawmakers may have to do with residual fear and shock of McCarthy era Communism. Many counter-advertisements of a single-payer system play into this comparison, aiding this association. The problem may also come down to a misrepresented concept of socialism in the first place.

Leaders pushing for a Universal Healthcare system have had to be explicit in regard to their vision of the future of the US to delineate their views as contrasting communism. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has explicitly likened her view of democratic socialism to Scandinavian social democracy. In an interview with [Business Insider](#), she said that her progressive platform consists of a single-payer health care system that covers all forms of health care: “That's what democratic socialism means in 2018, and not this kind of McCarthyism Red Scare of a past era.”

The healthcare systems of the Scandinavian countries to which Ocasio Cortez [refers regularly outperform that of the US](#). [The Swedish public healthcare system](#), introduced in 1955, aided a transformation of the country from one of the poorest in Europe to the fourth richest country in the world. The system is publicly financed and heavily decentralized, allowing autonomy on all levels. The system is also set up to provide specialized care in concentrated areas, allowing for the conservation of resources. As a result, the country spends less than 10% of GNP on healthcare, but still manages to outperform most other countries. One would hope that the efficiency and cost-effective nature of the Swedish public system would humble the American capitalist argument against a public system.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed many longstanding problems woven into the fabric of the US’s societal fabric. It’s estimated that within the first six months of the pandemic, [between 3.1 and 7.7 million people](#) lost jobs with employer-provided insurance. I would hope that the pandemic has taught us the importance of well-regulated healthcare, after two years and counting of exorbitant stress on our healthcare system that has brought unequal strife and disparities to vulnerable populations. Perhaps the way forward in the fight for a Universal Healthcare system is a proposal likening the goals of a public system to the goals of those opposing parties, emphasizing the efficiency and cost effectiveness other countries have shown through a Universal Healthcare system. The New Deal, introducing a wave of some of the most long-lasting progressive policies the US has seen, was born out of some of the most devastating and grave conditions produced by the economic collapse of 1929 and the following Great Depression. I am hopeful that the painful suffering that has been taken on by our country's most vulnerable populations may now produce a system that will better care for us all.