

# The Grouse House Gazette

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## **A SHORT ATTENTION SPAN HISTORY OF HEALTH INSURANCE IN AMERICA**

As America's health insurance system stumbles forward toward the abyss of Trumpcare... it is important that people understand how we got to this point in America.

People seem to always talk generally about "healthcare"... when we are really talking about how we all pay for it. And Trumpcare is actually not so much a "healthcare system" as it is a tax break for the wealthy with the top 1% earners gaining a \$350 billion dollar tax break over the next ten years. It was a tax on those making over \$200,000 a year (\$250K for couples) that paid for the subsidies that made Obamacare work.

Obamacare does seem to be working far better in states with Democratic governors who embraced the Medicaid expansion and supported the system with well-run exchanges. I live in New York State and have had a great experience with Obamacare for two years now. When I joined... my premiums went down... all of my doctors remained the same... and I had a preexisting heart condition. And yes... my monthly premium went up seventy-five dollars this year... big deal... still well worth it.

I was with Blue Cross before in the private market and I am still on Blue Cross through Obamacare... with much better coverage.

Fortunately I am legally contracted through the end of the year and I turn 65 in November... when I will move to Medicare. I feel like I'm stepping off the stern of the Titanic just as the ship goes down around me!

When Republicans point out exploding premiums it is usually in our "red" states like Arizona that only have one provider greedily offering coverage at insane rates because there is no competition.

Whereas in New York I had a choice of several *competing* plans. And those living in Republican run states (whose governments ran away from Obamacare) have frequently not done well under the system.

Republicans have also long claimed that the mandate was unconstitutional... even though it held up in court. And without the mandate... individual coverage obviously collapses.

In a recent Power Point presentation Paul Ryan stated that the reason Obamacare was failing was that the smaller percentage of unhealthy participants was being paid for by the much larger percentage of healthy people. Which was funny, as Ryan had simply described how *all* insurance works! (How is it that this man has positioned himself as “the thinking man’s Republican”?). His plan is totally dysfunctional.

And about that “unconstitutional” mandate...

The *first* mandate to purchase health insurance actually came from President John Adams in 1798... when he signed a bill *mandating* that all merchant seaman purchase health insurance. It was an occupation with high hazards and the rest of the citizenry covered the cost of treatment. Adams felt that they should take responsibility for their own care. Sound familiar?

But I suppose this one shouldn’t count... because after all... what the hell did John Adams know about the Constitution?

In 1929... A group of schoolteachers in Dallas Texas banded together to form an alliance to buy “hospital time” at Baylor University Hospital for their group. This was the *first* modern “employer based” healthcare plan.

In 1935... FDR pushed for universal healthcare to ease the suffering during the depression... but he gave up the fight in favor of going for Social Security instead.

In 1942... with the country entering WWII...FDR froze wages across the board for all public and private employees. The military was drafting most of the men

and FDR knew that wages could skyrocket as employers out-bid each other for the available workers.

So employers all began offering health benefits as a hiring incentive to get around the wage restrictions.

And PRESTO! We got ourselves an “employer based” healthcare system!

Meanwhile “across the pond”... with the countries and their economies devastated by WWII... governments stepped in directly to handle their healthcare. And “universal healthcare” was born.

In the United Kingdom... their “National Health” became quite popular and easily survived the budget cutting ravages of Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s. And these “single payer” systems exist in every other major Western industrialized country today... while in the United States in most cases we pay as high as twice as much for care due to our unique middle level of profitability inhabited by our insurance companies. And we have a worse infant mortality rate than any European country (other than Albania).

Back in the United States... in 1965... LBJ (certainly our most politically powerful president since FDR)... was able to *strong-arm* congress into passing Medicare. Which has been a major success ever since.

And what did Republicans say about Medicare at the time?

RONALD REAGAN (1965): *"Write those letters now; call your friends and write to them. If you don't, this program I promise you, will pass just as surely as the sun will come up tomorrow... And if you don't do this and if I don't do it, one of these days we are going to spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children, what it once was like in America when men were free."*

And by the time Reagan got to the White House fifteen years later, the plight of the uninsured had gotten so bad that people were regularly *turned away* by emergency rooms if they could not prove that they were insured. People were actually dying... and there was a much-publicized case of a woman losing her

baby even though she *had* insurance. Unfortunately she had forgotten to bring her insurance card with her to the emergency room.

So Congress passed (and Reagan signed) a bi-partisan law called The Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act in 1986 that required *all* hospital emergency rooms to admit and “stabilize” anyone showing up at their doors *before* asking how payment would be made.

Which is how we got a system of people without insurance going to the emergency room for *anything* that ailed them. And when people can’t pay... which is often... the government... and then *all* of us... end up picking up the tab through our taxes. This is where some of the big savings of Obamacare come in.

So... after Reagan warned us that Medicare was “socialized medicine”... he signed legislation that essentially turned the uninsured over to the government for their healthcare needs to be performed in very expensive emergency rooms. For which all of us would pay.

The even greater irony is that by requiring Americans to be insured through the mandate... Obamacare actually started to “privatize” Reagan’s “public” emergency care system... Is your head spinning yet?

And with Trumpcare... we will be returning to a system where society’s most vulnerable will be going *back* to our emergency rooms for their care... as the plan calls for 11 million Americans to be dropped off of Medicaid... all while the 1% make \$350 billion in ten years off the deal.

Welcome to the “Age of Mean”!

My own possibly overly simplistic solution would be to keep Obamacare but add a “public option” (Medicare that you pay for) as competition for the private insurance companies in states that have fewer than three competing private health insurance companies. The Medicare system is all in place. Why not simply use it as a government run insurance company to give competition to the price gougers in states like Arizona?

I know... I know... it would never get past the lobbyists.

But right now we are heading toward a nightmare for our healthcare coverage. All of us... not just those on the exchanges and Medicaid.

The American Medical Association... hospital & nursing organizations... as well as the AARP... have all come out against Trumpcare.

It actually targets the 50-65 “elderly” the worst.

And it’s not just going to hurt the independent workers like myself... as you should keep in mind that Obamacare requires companies with more than fifty employees to cover them with insurance. With that rule gone... a lot of people working for companies across the country will also lose their coverage when their companies decide it’s too expensive to “give” them healthcare.

Trump has spent his entire life trying to put his name on as many things as possible.

But lately when he spoke of the disastrous mission in Yemen he said that “his generals” had lost the Navy Seal. Not “we”.... Not “I”... It is *always* someone else’s fault. He knew it was a screwed up mission.

And now the White House is telling everyone *not* to call this “Trumpcare”.

Why do you think that is?

Maybe because Trump knows it sucks... and just wants to pass something fast to check off another campaign promise.

But what about his promise not to touch Medicaid?

Early in the campaign Trump actually supported universal healthcare as he had seen how well it works for his company in Scotland.

Trumpcare is about to be particularly crippling to the State of West Virginia.

More than any other state in America.

A state Trump carried in a landslide.

With the lowest life expectancy in America.

But that's ok... because Trump is "*bringing back coal*"!

Why doesn't he just bring back "whale oil" as well?

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