

Perhaps one of the most important debates raging now in Washington is centered on the socialization, or nationalization, of health care, essentially putting all or most Americans on the equivalent of Medicare. The proponents of such an idea can often be heard saying that Americans have a "right" to medical care or that no one should be denied this "right" simply because they can't or don't want to pay for it. Rather, the larger question here should be: Is, or should, health care be a "right" in American society.

In answering this question, it is important to refer back to the founding documents of our nation.

The second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence says in part: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Nowhere does it mention anything about free MRIs.

In school, we were taught that the first 10 amendments to the Constitution were ratified in 1791, and collectively they form our Bill of Rights. The First Amendment states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

The Second Amendment enumerates the "right of the people to keep and bear arms." The Fourth Amendment guarantees "the right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures." The Fifth Amendment says someone shall "not be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself," and the Sixth outlines the "right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury."

I could go on, but these rights bear a common thread. Each restricts the government from taking what Americans naturally possess. You have a life, the liberty to do as you wish, and the ability to pursue whatever happiness means to you. No one has to give these rights to you because you naturally begin life with them.

Rights are not about giving you something for free; they are about protecting natural liberties

from those who would take them away from you.

For instance, the Second Amendment guarantees the right to bear arms. It does not however, say that you get guns for free if you don't have one.

This is analogous to the issue of health care "rights." If socialized-medicine proponents argued that everyone should have the right to go where and when they want to receive the medical treatment they want and need, I would agree with them. But instead, they argue that someone else should be compelled to pay for the costs of medical care that others want to receive.

When you hear someone say that health care should be "free" or that the "government" should pay for it, they are really talking about two payment methods. The first requires doctors, nurses, and other medical care providers to work without compensation, via government fiat, so that the patient doesn't have to pay. The second option provides that the government will require others to work for nothing in order to transfer their income to pay for the health care of another.

In reality, the Obama/Pelosi health care proposal does some of both. But by doing so, it effectively restricts the rights of people by forcing a significant part of the population to work for free so that others get the benefits of their labors without charge. Make no mistake, such proposals deprive the populace of freedom; they do not extend it.

A "right" to services without charge, that forces someone else to provide for you, does not and should not ever exist. No one in a free society should have a "right" to anything that requires others to toil against their will on behalf of those unwilling to provide for themselves.

There absolutely should be a number of changes in the health care system and as a society, we have a number of ways to care for the indigent. But we should move farther away from the failed government-controlled medical models, rather than expanding that failure. Addressing health care is something we are already prepared to do. By empowering private enterprise we can achieve more economical, advanced, and better alternatives to that of a government-run health care system. In so doing, we can enhance the ability of the people to embrace the true fundamental rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Unfortunately, President Barack Obama and the Democratic leadership of this Congress have no intention of working constructively with Republicans on this issue.