

# UNITED SPINAL<sup>NOW</sup>

## Healthcare For All

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Throughout the Democratic presidential debates, and then again during the election, the term “Medicare for All” was bandied about. Unique among Democratic candidates, President-Elect Biden opposed “Medicare for All”, but supported a “public option” as part of a plan to enhance Obamacare.

“Medicare for All” was attacked by Republicans and conservative columnists, as creeping socialism. Nevertheless, only a few years ago, Tea Party supporters, in an expression of incredibly confused populism, carried signs that said, “Keep the government’s hands off my Medicare,” as if Medicare was private insurance, and not a government program. Republican politicians wanted to protect Medicare for seniors, and still say they do (while they propose cuts, etc.), but consider “Medicare for All” a socialist idea.

Long before his presidential candidacy and even before he ran for governor of California, Ronald Reagan opposed Medicare for seniors. In 1961, he predicted that if passed, Medicare (just for senior citizens) would begin the country’s descent “into socialist hell.”

Pres. Lyndon Johnson signed Medicare into law in 1965. At that time, only 54 percent of those over 65 had insurance that covered hospitalization, and private insurance routinely dropped older customers as too risky. Three years later, 96 percent of seniors had coverage for hospitalization.

By 1987, Pres. Ronald Reagan was proposing an expansion of Medicare to cover catastrophic illness for seniors. He said it would give older Americans “...that last full measure of security...” and would limit out-of-pocket expenses to a predictable, affordable amount, no matter how much healthcare seniors consumed.

What was originally seen by Pres. Reagan as a descent into “socialist hell” was seen by the same man in 1987 as “security.” It became OK for right-wingers to protect Medicare for seniors. Perhaps because of Medicare, seniors were living longer, retiring, using Social Security retirement benefits to fund retirement and using Medicare to stay healthy and independent.

The cowardice of some politicians accounts for the hypocrisy of supporting and expanding Medicare for seniors, while denying the same coverage to the rest of America. Seniors vote as a bloc and are more likely to vote than younger Americans. Seniors as a group support Medicare and are unafraid of creeping socialism when they do. However, many—even seniors—oppose “Medicare for All” as a socialist proposal.

Now that the heat of the presidential election is almost over (as I write this, Pres. Trump has yet to concede) the Biden Administration will address healthcare reform. There were problems with Obamacare for people with disabilities, but preexisting condition exclusions and waiting periods have been eliminated by the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and so have annual and lifetime caps on care. The fact that the ACA allowed limits on durable medical equipment and medical supplies was the bad that came with the good, and we resolved to make it better. United Spinal intends to address this lingering Obamacare issue with the new administration, but we, of course, still support the ACA.

It is time, however, for those who oppose “Medicare for All” to explain why it’s OK for some, but not everyone else.

Scott Atlas, Pres. Trump’s recently-departed “expert” on coronavirus, who did not support masks or social distancing and favored killing millions to achieve herd immunity, wrote an op-ed last March in the *New York Times*, in which he opposed “Medicare for All.” His point was that Medicare pays below market prices for healthcare, and private insurers pay above market prices to subsidize Medicare. So, he felt, the system would collapse if everyone paid the Medicare rate. The public pays premiums and taxes. Why, if Atlas is right, are we subsidizing Medicare for seniors with private insurance?

“Medicare for All” provides a consistent approach to healthcare and to paying for it. And by the way, despite everyone’s fears that national healthcare is inferior to our system and those opposing national healthcare subjecting us to a constant refrain of “we have the best healthcare in the world,” compare our coronavirus numbers with democratic countries with national healthcare systems. We appear to be a developing nation, not the country providing the best healthcare in the world.