

On the Anniversary of Medicare Comes a Renewed Call for 'Medicare for All'

Created *Tuesday, August 3, 2010*

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Forty-five years ago today, on July 30, 1965, President Lyndon Johnson flew to Independence, Missouri, to mark a milestone in the long struggle to establish healthcare as a right, not a privilege, for all Americans.

With reporters and photographers surrounding them, Johnson took a place beside former President Harry Truman, who the sitting president thanked for "planting the seeds of compassion and duty which have today flowered into care for the sick and serenity for the fearful."

With that, Johnson completed the signing of the Social Security Act of 1965 [1], and establishing the universal, single-payer public insurance programs for the elderly and low-income Americans that we know as Medicare and Medicaid.

Truman was delighted to be part of the celebration. But he and Johnson knew that they had not completed the work Truman began when, as part of a "Fair Deal" program developed to complete the work of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, he had proposed a national healthcare program for all Americans.

That work is still unfinished, which is why Congressman Dennis Kucinich [2], D-Ohio, says: "I celebrate Medicare's birthday by pledging to continue the fight to implement Medicare for All nationally and at the state level, where there is so much promise."

Congressman John Conyers [3], D-Michigan, says: "As we honor Medicare's 45th birthday today, I am proud to say that the movement for Medicare for All remains strong and vibrant. I look forward to working with my colleagues, activists, and my other friends in the single payer community to improve H.R. 676 over the next few months, before reintroducing it in the 112th Congress. While we must continue to work for the passage of a true universal health care bill, we must also be vigilant in our efforts to protect the health care

benefits many Americans count on today. Over 47 million older adults and people with disabilities look to Medicare as a source of health and financial security. During this period of increased concern over the size of the federal deficit, Medicare and other social insurance programs are increasingly at risk of being targeted for benefit cuts. I pledge to work with my colleagues in the Congress to defeat any proposal that threatens any of these critically important programs."

And Senator Bernie Sanders [4], I-Vermont, says of the "Medicare for All" model that Truman imagined and Johnson began to implement: "In my view, the single-payer approach is the only way we will ever have a cost-effective, comprehensive health care system in this country. One of the reasons our current health care system is so expensive, so wasteful, so bureaucratic, so inefficient is that it is heavily dominated by private health insurance companies whose only goal in life is to make as much money as they can."

Kucinich, Conyers and Sanders fought frustrating battles during the recent healthcare reform debate to get Congress and the Obama administration to focus on the right fix for a broken system. They were thwarted more frequently than they succeeded, although Kucinich forced the House to confront the issue and Sanders got some critical funding for clinics that will provide care to those most in need.

Now, on the forty-fifth anniversary of the moment when Truman and Johnson celebrated a major move in the right direction, however, the trio has renewed the "Medicare for All" call.

In a letter, Sanders, Conyers and Kucinich write [4]: "Now that a new health care bill has been signed into law, it has never been more important to have a strong movement behind Medicare for All."

At the same time they warn that: "The truth is not enough. We already know that such a health care system has repeatedly proven to control costs more effectively, cover everyone or almost everyone, and deliver care of significantly higher quality than health care systems that tolerate the presence of private health insurance companies. Now we must make it so that the truth can no longer be ignored."

Harry Truman had another way of saying it. Complaining about the conservatives in Congress who had beaten him on more than a few economic issues in the first few years of his presidency, Truman decided he was going to explain to the American people exactly what was going on when his partisan rivals tried to raised all sorts of false arguments to divide workers and farmers: "It's an old political trick: 'If you can't convince 'em, confuse 'em,' he explained during the 1948 campaign he was supposed to lose. "But this time it won't work."

It worked. Truman was re-elected in what remains the definitional political upset of the past century.

The conservatives did not back off. They played the "confuse 'em" card again during the debate over health care.

But Truman promised that America would eventually "adopt a comprehensive and modern health program for the Nation." [5]

The healthcare "reform" America got this year may take the country a few steps in the right direction. But as Sanders, Conyers and Kucinich note: "Many health care experts have expressed concern that the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act does not adequately contain costs for American families and businesses. If they are correct, and we believe they are, additional legislative cost-containment measures will be necessary in the future."

"When it is time for Congress to try and control health care costs again," the senator and congressmen argue, "the demand for Medicare for All must be undeniable."

To Sanders, Conyers and Kucinich, Harry Truman would undoubtedly say: "Give 'em hell!"Source URL:

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<http://kucinich.house.gov/>[3] <http://conyers.house.gov/>[4]

<http://sanders.senate.gov/>[5]

<http://www.trumanlibrary.org/anniversaries/healthprogram.htm>

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