

The great healthcare debate: liberalism versus conservatism



Alex Fisher

A large issue in today's society is healthcare. The clashing ideas about what should be done within the realm of healthcare is such a big deal now more than ever since we have a recently elected president. Much like other issues, there are clashing ideas from different political parties; this case will highlight those of liberals and conservatives. It is important to note that liberals and conservatives tend to clash on all aspects of healthcare such as: amount of government intervention, access or entitlement to healthcare, and federally mandated insurance. Furthermore, it must be stated that each party's stance on these aspects demonstrates a key idea or pillar of their party.

The first main aspect of the healthcare debate between the two parties is the amount or level of government involvement. The conservative side argues for minimal government involvement so that healthcare, just like the overall economy, runs like a free market. This facet of the conservative healthcare argument can be traced back to the concept that "the conservative perceives the need for prudent restraints upon power and upon human passions" (Kirk, 4). Kirk further explains this point of view by stating that "The conservative endeavors to so limit and balance political power that anarchy or tyranny may not arise" (4). Additionally, this point of view can also be traced back to the conservative concept that "there must survive orders and classes, differences in material condition, and many sorts of inequality attempts at levelling must lead, at best, to social stagnation" (3). Essentially, Kirk is explaining that conservatives believe that unless there is a natural hierarchy with competition, a society will stagnate or lose the

<https://assignbuster.com/the-great-healthcare-debate-liberalism-versus-conservatism/>

ability to progress. After piecing together these pillars of conservative view, it is not surprising that the current conservative argument is for healthcare to be run like any other business in our economy with free market ideals.

With this being said, there is a liberal side to the argument of government involvement in healthcare. Their point of view is the complete opposite of the conservatives in that they believe that everyone in the healthcare field should be equal, therefore getting rid of the competition that fuels the free market. The liberal background that influences this point of view is a bit more complex than that of conservatives. One concept in liberalism is that there is a natural state in which mankind falls into. This state of nature involves a natural hierarchy of physical and mental strength; however, it must be stated that this hierarchy will lead to competition; “ For as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, wither by secret machination or by confederacy with others that are in the same danger with himself” (Hobbes, 1). At first, this concept seems to parallel with the competition and free market ideals of conservatism.

However, there is a caveat to this liberal view. Liberals recognize this state of nature, and then argue that mankind should forgo this state for the good of society. Hobbes explains that “ during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war” (2). This statement explains the idea that the duration in which mankind is living without a governing power, they are in constant war with each other due to the high levels of competition in the state of nature.

Furthermore:

<https://assignbuster.com/the-great-healthcare-debate-liberalism-versus-conservatism/>

In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and continual fear, and danger of violent death (Hobbes, 2)

Essentially, this concept in liberalism is that mankind must forgo the vicious competition and violence found in the natural state in order for society, industry, and culture to even exist. These aspects cannot be established if man is more concerned with preserving his own life, and ending that of others to get ahead. For this reason, the liberals are arguing for more equality and less of a business or free market model in the healthcare field.

The second main point of contention in the healthcare debate is the question of who should and should not be entitled to healthcare. It is important to note that both liberals and conservatives agree that everyone should get healthcare. The difference in views is found when it comes the financial aspect of healthcare entitlement. Conservatives believe that if you have money to pay for healthcare, you should be paying for it. They do not believe in government assistance for healthcare if you can pay for it yourself.

Essentially, it goes back to the old adage that there is no such thing as a free lunch; except in this case its healthcare instead of lunch. This concept can be explained through the conservative concept that “ conservatives are guided by their principle of prudence” (Kirk, 3). What this means that “ Any public measure ought to be judged by its probable long-run consequences, not merely by temporary advantage or popularity” (3). Conservatives do not want to just start handing out healthcare for free or at discounted prices because it would have a hefty impact on the economy in the long-run. In the <https://assignbuster.com/the-great-healthcare-debate-liberalism-versus-conservatism/>

present time, the general population would love to have free or even cheap healthcare, but the United States' economy is not in the position to be able to do that. This is what the conservatives are thinking about when refusing to give handouts.

Conversely, the liberal view is that even if you could pay for healthcare, you should not go broke for it. This concept can be traced back to the liberalistic idea that “ the whole purpose of government is the preservation of property” (Locke, 3). Furthermore, this connects to their idea of abandoning the state of nature because “ The great purpose for which men enter into society is to be safe and at peace in their use of their property” (Locke, 3). Forcing people to pay for healthcare until they reach bankruptcy violates these ideas. By making people give up all their money for such a basic right like healthcare, the government is no longer preserving the property (or money) of the people in the society.

To take this concept even further, there are things that liberals believe a governing body cannot do. Among this list is “ it doesn't and can't possibly have absolutely arbitrary power over the lives and fortunes of the people” (Locke, 4). It should also be noted that Locke stated that “ legislature can never have a right to destroy, enslave, or deliberately impoverish the subjects” (5). Making people pay for healthcare until they no longer can, instead of giving government assistance completely goes against these liberal ideals. It is for this reason that liberals prefer to provide assistance for healthcare even if the person has the ability to pay for it.

The third focus of the healthcare debate is the concept of federally mandated insurance. This refers to whether decisions about laws involving healthcare and health insurance should be left to the federal government or if it should be an issue that is decided on a state by state basis. According to an article by Michael Bihari, MD:

Mandated health insurance laws passed at either the federal or state level usually fall into one of three categories: Health care services or treatments that must be covered, such as substance abuse treatment. Healthcare providers other than physicians, such as acupuncturists. Dependents and other related individuals, such as adopted children

Essentially, what Dr. Bihari is saying is that the most common mandated healthcare laws involve the coverage of necessary treatments, specialists, and dependents. After getting a good idea of what these mandated healthcare laws typically are, it should be aware that the most common debate on this aspect is who gets to decide if the law gets passed or not. Should each state get to choose if they want to pass and recognize the laws set forth or should the federal government pass healthcare laws for the entire nation? A subset of this question is should people face financial penalties if they fail to comply with these mandates?

The conservative view on this matter is that these decisions should be made on the state level, not federal. Furthermore, the conservative party argues against any form of monetary penalties if people fail to adhere to these healthcare laws. For example, under the Affordable Care Act, there is fine for people that do not have health insurance. The conservative view is against

this concept of health insurance mandate compliance. This side of the argument can be traced back to the conservative pillar that “ conservatives uphold voluntary community, quite as they oppose involuntary collectivism” (Kirk, 4). Additionally, conservatives believe that:

the decisions most directly affecting the lives of citizens are made locally and voluntarily. Some of these functions are carried out by local political bodies, others by private associations; so long as they are kept local, and are marked by the general agreement of those affected, they constitute healthy community. (Kirk, 4)

In layman’s terms, conservatives believe that decisions that greatly impact citizens, such as healthcare, should be decided by a governing body close to the population. This big of a decision cannot and should not be made by the federal governing body since each state has a different set of circumstances. There is no way that the federal government is completely aware of the needs of the people of each state. Furthermore, conservatives are against forced collectivism. Leaving healthcare mandates to the federal level means that these decisions are being made for the entire nation. It is forced collectivism by means of the nation instead of the individuality of each state. Moreover, giving that kind of collective power to the federal government “ gives way to a standardizing process hostile to freedom and human dignity” (Kirk, 4). Each state should have the freedom and ability to decide what is best to uphold or bolster the standard of living created in each. Furthermore, each person should be given the freedom to make their own choices about a personal matter such as healthcare. Penalizing people for not complying with healthcare mandates takes away this freedom of decision.

<https://assignbuster.com/the-great-healthcare-debate-liberalism-versus-conservatism/>

On the contrary, liberals argue for healthcare mandates on the federal level. They also support the idea of monetary penalties for noncompliance. This aligns with the current themes seen in the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare. The Affordable Care Act is a federally mandated healthcare act that penalizes people that do not have insurance. This view can be explained by the classical liberal idea that:

The only way to erect such a common power, as may be able to defend them from the invasion of foreigners, and the injuries of one another, and thereby to secure them in such sort as that by their own industry and by the fruits of the earth they may nourish themselves and live contentedly, is to confer all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of men, they may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will. (Hobbes, 3)

What Hobbes is saying is that in order to organize the chaos of the state of nature, the people must decide on a person or group of people to represent all their voices and decisions in one. Additionally, Hobbes further explains the scope of this “assembly of men”:

every one to own and acknowledge himself to be author of whatsoever he that so beareth their person shall act in those things which concern the common peace and safety; and therein submit their wills and their judgements to his judgement. (3)

This further explanation translates into the concept that liberals believe that government should have a large amount of power and intervention. This is the reason why the liberals are arguing for federally mandated healthcare laws. Another level of that increased government power and intervention is <https://assignbuster.com/the-great-healthcare-debate-liberalism-versus-conservatism/>

the aspect of financial penalty for noncompliance. These fines are ensuring that everyone is following their mandates.

In conclusion, the debate on healthcare has been going on for several years and has shown no signs of stopping anytime soon. The liberal and conservative parties have clashing views on aspects of this debate such as the amount of government involvement, access or entitlement to healthcare, and if healthcare should be federally mandated. The views or arguments of these parties can be explained and traced back to key ideas or pillars of their party. Conservatives favor less government intervention, prudent reform, and local governing bodies whereas liberals favor more government intervention, equality or less competition, and that a government should not deliberately impoverish their community.

<https://www.verywell.com/mandated-health-insurance-benefits-1738931>