

**Political Studies Program, Summer 2011
HEALTHCARE & THE WELFARE STATE
Instructor: Yuval Levin
Washington, D.C.**

Throughout the debate over the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, the word "historic" was constantly on the lips of the bill's champions, and the notion that the bill was the latest in a long line of consistent forward steps was everywhere in the air. President Obama, when signing the measure, described it as the culmination of "almost a century of trying," and said the law contained "reforms that generations of Americans have fought for and marched for and hungered to see." As House Speaker Nancy Pelosi called the final vote to a close, she used the same gavel that had been used when the House voted to enact the Medicare and Medicaid programs in 1965, to emphasize the point that these were all elements of one large project.

But Pelosi's chosen symbol stood for more than she intended. While the enactment of the two massive health-care entitlements of the Great Society period may have represented the peak of social-democratic activism in America, those two entitlements now also represent the failure of the social-democratic vision in practice. They have grown so unwieldy and expensive as to be thoroughly unsustainable, and in the process have helped inflate costs in the broader health-care sector in ways that now imperil the nation's fiscal future. The new health-care entitlement promises to do more of the same, and thus to place even further stress on the crumbling foundations of our welfare state.

In this seminar, students will examine the theoretical roots and foundations of social welfare policy, and explore government's role in the health sector—with a view toward answering the question: How do we balance our aspirations to prosperity and virtue and build a thriving society that makes its wealth and promise accessible to all?

Monday, July 4, 2011, 9:00 am to Noon

What Is Government For? Public Policy in a Liberal Democracy

Reading:

- The Declaration of Independence
- The U.S. Constitution (focus on the preamble and Article I)
- Office of Management and Budget, "Proposed Budget of the United States Government, FY 2012 (Summary Overview)"

Discussion Questions:

1. What does the Declaration suggest is the purpose of government in general? Does it strike you as an adequate description?
2. How does the Declaration's idea of the purpose of government compare with what the Constitution suggests is the purpose of the United States government?
3. How does the protection of rights manifest itself in the activities of a government?
4. What is "policy" and what is it for?

5. Judging from its budget, how would you describe what the U.S. government does today?

Tuesday, July 5, 2011, 9:00 am to Noon

Welfare and Benefits as Public Policy

Reading:

- Thomas Paine, "Agrarian Justice"
- Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (selections)
- Friedrich Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (selections)
- John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (selections)

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the grounds for using government to provide money or benefits to some citizens? How do Paine's grounds for doing so differ from Croly's or Rawls's?
2. What is the difference, in both practical and philosophical terms, between social insurance and welfare?
3. Does Hayek disagree with the ends that Paine, Croly, and Rawls propose, or only with their means?

Wednesday, July 6, 2011, 9:00 am to Noon

Health Care as a Moral Issue

Reading:

- Norman Daniels, "Is There a Right to Health Care?"
- Peter Singer, "Why We Must Ration Health Care"
- Avik Roy, "Health Care and the Profit Motive"

Discussion Questions:

1. Is there a right to health care? If so, what kind of right? What kind of health care?
2. Does the moral case for providing the poor with health insurance rely on arguments about rights?
3. How does the moral argument for providing health insurance to the poor bear on the practical argument regarding how to provide it?

Thursday, July 7, 2011, 9:00 am to Noon

Health Care as a Fiscal Issue

Reading:

- Paul Starr, “The Logic of Health Care Reform”
- Atul Gawande, “The Cost Conundrum”
- James Capretta, “What’s Ailing Health Care?”

Discussion Questions:

1. How do liberals and conservatives explain why health care costs so much? What does the difference between their explanations suggest?
2. What is the connection between the moral case for health insurance and the problem of paying for it?
3. How should policymakers prioritize the question of health-care policy? How much should it matter, and for what reasons?

Friday, July 8, 2011, 9:00 am to Noon

The Health Care Policy Debate

Reading:

- Kaiser Family Foundation, “Summary of the New Health Reform Law”
- Office of Congressman Paul Ryan, “Summary of the Patient’s Choice Act”
- Jacob Hacker, “The Case for Public Plan Choice in National Health Care Reform”
- James Capretta and Tom Miller, “The Defined Contribution Route to Health Care Choice and Competition”

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the nature of the new health-care law’s approach to solving our health-care financing problems? What assumptions underlie it?
2. What is the nature of Rep. Paul Ryan’s alternative approach? What assumptions underlie it?
3. What is the basic disagreement between these two approaches? What assumptions do they share in common? Is there room for compromise between them?
4. What can we learn about the nature of policy and policymaking from this disagreement?