

# Michael Moore's 'Sicko' misdiagnoses the malady

I saw "Sicko" last weekend. It made me mad as hell.

It's outrageous that, in a nation as wealthy as America, people still don't have access to health care. It's infuriating that medical decisions are being made by insurance company employees in a cubicle. And it is truly horrible to believe, as Michael Moore does, that nationalized health care will solve these problems.

Moore's latest bit of agitprop filmmaking goes like this:

- 1) The system is bad.
- 2) Here are some true stories of people who have suffered.
- 3) Insurance companies make tons of money at your expense. You're over your head in debt and taking drugs to deal with the stress. That's why you don't vote. Also, while you weren't looking, the government got bought by the health care industry.
- 4) Canada has nationalized health care, and it's great. Here are some actual Canadians who say so. Europe has nationalized health care, and it's great. Here are some actual Europeans who say so. France is really, really great. Here are some Americans living in France who say so.

5) Let's have nationalized health care in America. The End.

Look, Mike, here's the deal. Health care is the most regulated industry in the United States. Most of the people you talked with lost their insurance when they lost their jobs. Why are health benefits tied to work? Because of tax laws dating back to World War II. Why can't insurance policies just spell out what is covered and what is not? Be-



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cause of health insurance regulations. Why do we rely so much on insurance to begin with? Because that's how Congress has set things up.

It's precisely because Congress controls so much of health care spending, either directly through Medicare and Medicaid, or indirectly through regulation, that the health

care industry has so much influence in Washington.

Those of us who champion economic freedom have to explain this to you lefties over and over again. You demand more and more political involvement in something. Once you get it, you're shocked, shocked to discover that people are giving more money to politicians. Don't you get it? Lobbying and influence peddling are not the problem. They are the symptom. Your misguided policies are the cause.

Michael, ask yourself this: Does health care in the U.S. really look like a market? In a free market, buyers and sellers are permitted to engage in any mutually beneficial transaction. Today, most beneficial arrangements in health insurance are illegal.

In a market, subsidies and distortions are kept to a minimum. For the past 60 years, the tax code has artificially tied health insurance to employment.

In a market, consumers pay for goods with their own money. This en-

courages them to make responsible purchasing decisions and to make cost/benefit trade-offs that ultimately provide useful information to society via the price system. Today, approximately three-quarters of all health care bills are paid for with someone else's dollars. Given these and other examples from Congress' five-decade history of increased involvement in health care, how can anyone believe that our health care problems are due to icky, nasty, evil, profit-making capitalism?

Let me just point out that no matter what the system, health care is rationed. Always. Choices must be made about who is going to get what. That means benefits, costs and tough decisions. Nothing, including health care, can be made "free" by passing laws. Sorry, but there is no Santa Claus.

Universal, mandated health coverage is a terrible idea. It's absolutely crucial that medical care get better and cheaper every day, every year, for every generation. The system you propose will never do that. Market-oriented health care will.

But there is no film out there that can make my case. That's why you have influence. If it were possible to use film to get the same emotional reaction in defense of private property and free markets that a typical crop of lefty film-school graduates can get in support of their pet causes, socialism would have been defeated long ago. As it is, we'll be fighting this battle for a long, long time.

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