

Partial to public or private?

Written by Gary L. Flowers, NNPA Columnist
Wednesday, 30 September 2009 15:13

Today's debate over legislative issues such as health care, education, and energy boil down to whether public interests or private interests will benefit. I am partial to public. The word public is an adjective pertaining to, or affecting the people of a community, state, or nation.

Many believe the Latin phrase *res publica* is the origin of the word republic, for example, Democratic Republic, under which the United States of America is governed. Historically, Roman authors used the word to describe the period of time (epoch) between the Roman Kingdom and the Roman Empire. Later, the Greeks translated the term into *politeia* - the organization process of a city-state.

Of course, the word public is found in the name of the political party known as Republican. In 1854, when the Republican Party was established the legislative agenda was centered on the public good. For example, Abraham Lincoln campaigned for the Presidency on, in part, an anti-slavery political platform. By 1960, following the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling, the people and priorities of Republican Party moved to private interest.

Rather than comply with the law of the land to racially desegregate schools, many southerners established private educational academies in churches to maintain all-White classrooms. For example, the Commonwealth of Virginia closed entire school districts rather than have Black and White students learn together.

When President Richard Nixon was elected in 1968, he ushered in the concept of private health insurance through his relationship with Edward Kaiser who founded Kaiser Permanente. The idea was for private health insurance companies to profit by denying—not providing—health insurance to the public. Since then, privatized health insurance providers have billions of dollars on the broken backs of public. Recent research provided by Amy Goodman on the Pacifica Radio Network show "Democracy Now" reveals that California health insurance companies' denial rate for health insurance claims ranges between 25 percent and 39 percent. Each denial of the policyholders represents more profit for the private company.

Therefore, when President Obama stated his preference for the "public option" in health insurance the Re-publicans held public rallies to preserve private profits. Does such make any sense? Some argued that the President's plan was the beginning of socialized medicine in a capitalist economy.

Actually, my studies of capitalism bear out that two of the primary tenets of capitalism are choice and competition. Duh? If the the public has the option to choose health providers which include a government-run health insurance, it seems to me to be consistent with free market capitalism. Like Michael Moore, I believe capitalism is inherently unGodly and unAmerican. Greed should not trump need.

Predictably, I believe in public access, public broadcasting, public domain, public Internet, public safety, public education, public interest, and most of all, public good. Politics can be defined as who gets what, and how much. American policy should benefit the masses. Power to the people!

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