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An inalienable right to a free Mercedes and a pair of sneakers

Buried in the “Bonus Matter” chapter of [Super Freakonomics](#) (by Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner), is a terrific description of the health care cost dilemma. The authors respond to a question about health reform and whether it will solve the problem:

“An even bigger problem, which was also not addressed in the reform bill, is that people aren’t paying for the services they get. . . . Imagine if you had the same situation with automobiles, where you could show up at the car dealership and say ‘I want the Mercedes for free.’ People will say ‘You can’t have the Mercedes for free. You have to pay \$50,000 for it.’ And you say, ‘Why not – I have an inalienable right to free healthcare, right? Why don’t I have an inalienable right to a free Mercedes?’”

Indeed, this problem has no politically palatable solution. No one can get elected by saying that we can all be happy driving Chevys. Instead, we elect people who promise that, in healthcare, we will all have the Mercedes and by some magical moves by the government, it will be cheaper than ever.

At the recent CNN Tea Party Express debate, this very issue came out to bite candidate Ron Paul. Moderator Wolf Blitzer asked Paul what should happen to the man who refuses to get health insurance and then has a medical crisis; should society just let him die?

Paul’s initial response was that freedom involves risks. This elicited some shouts from the audience. Paul then said that he’s not in favor of letting the man die. His point was that self-reliance had fallen by the wayside, and it is not government’s place to substitute for that.

The debate and the idea that government **should** be involved with healthcare is the topic of a fascinating editorial in the Los Angeles Times ([“Tyranny of the typical” Jonah Goldberg September 20, 2011](#)). In it, Goldberg describes philosopher Rothbard’s mythical State where the government supplied all the shoes. Once everyone became accustomed to getting their shoes from the government, proposing any other method would be considered lunacy.

Goldberg challenges us to re-think how and whether the government should be involved in health care. Perhaps we are just accustomed to having government involved, and there are better ways to achieve the goals.

It is worth a second thought.

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