

From the Archives

Here I Stand

Jack Schreiber, M.D.

We have it made. We Americans represent only 6% of the world's population, live on 7% of the earth's surface, yet we possess most of the world's good things. We have more bathtubs, more radios, more sewing machines, more automobiles—more everything than all the rest of the 94% of the world's population combined. In the span of about 200 years, we have become the richest, most powerful nation in the history of mankind.

This great, green, and precious place on earth we call America, however, didn't just happen. For 6,000 years, men fumbled and searched for the bright light of freedom. All was dark until men like Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, and others discovered the "magic formula." That formula says that freedom is a God-given right. It further says that true freedom is only possible when men are personally responsible for their own welfare. This, together with the profit motive (Capitalism), competition, and limited government have made America the envy of the rest of the world. The formula has worked because our forefathers wisely put God into it, and because we put God into it, we did not forget about those less fortunate.

Never have any people, at any time, anywhere had it so good. But in our present abundance and luxury, something totally unexpected has happened. Seldom has a nation been so blessed, yet seldom has a nation so blessed been so unable to fully enjoy its blessings. Many Americans are unhappy. The more we get, the more we want, and the less we want to share. At the present time, thousands of men are on strike. They are on strike, not because they are not making a good living, but because their union tells them that their employer's profits are "too high."

In the land whose founding fathers preached the virtues of thrift and self-reliance, something has gone terribly wrong when our government tells us we must sacrifice the fruits of our labor to support those who refuse to do any labor. Something is wrong when we have more people on the dole today than we ever did at the height of the Great Depression. How did we come to the point where there are now 150 separate federal bureaucracies just to administer welfare?

Unfortunately, most have forgotten all of the unique qualities that made America great. We have allowed the politicians to put their hands in our pockets and have been lulled to sleep by the promises of a "free lunch"—something for nothing. Government has become bigger so as to provide us all the things we have been clamoring for, and as a result the average man must now work nearly three hours a day just to pay his taxes.

Government is spending money it doesn't have to give us things we don't really need. The resultant inflation and higher taxes are threatening to bankrupt the richest nation on earth. Moreover, government is starting to pull the strings which were not supposed to be attached to all of the goodies we have been receiving. Governance by coercion, threat, and force is the predictable result.

Our country has contracted a very serious illness—the welfare state. Its symptoms are apathy, indifference to public affairs, loss of personal responsibility, lack of respect for law and order, and personal selfishness. The "do it yourself" motto of our forefathers

has been replaced by the "do it by government" credo of our unwise contemporaries. Norman Vincent Peale said it best: "Once we roared like lions for liberty; now we bleat like sheep for security." One thing is certain. By promising security instead of opportunity, we are destroying the very thing that made our kind of star-spangled freedom possible.

The cure for this malignant disease will not be found in bigger government. America needs patriots over whom nobody stands in control but God. The truth embodied in the American dream is that we are limited only by our own ambition and labor.

One treatment for this cancer lies in the ballot box. We can continue to send men to Washington who will continue to spend this country into bankruptcy, or we can elect patriots who will restore constitutional government. But it will take more than just votes to overcome this metastasizing welfare state. It will require getting involved in campaigns and making substantial contributions to those candidates who strive to restore us to the constitutional republic from which we were born. We must also educate and engage our youth in the political process, as they are the future of America.

Physicians of this country bear a special responsibility in fighting this cancerous welfare state. Let us not forget that Medicare is the cornerstone of the socialist welfare state. Other "tumors" will follow. And, like a malignancy, Medicare will not kill the patient early on in the course of the disease. But, rest assured, it will spread and attack the very essence of the highest quality of care in the world.

Those physicians who declare that they are "making more money than I ever did before," or that Medicare has not yet told them "how to practice medicine," are ignoring the lessons of history. Government must ultimately control that which it subsidizes.

Medicare was underpriced and oversold, and the bill, which is much more than the "experts" predicted, is now coming due. This will result in either higher taxes or limitation of services or both. And, it will be non-medical government bureaucrats making the medical decisions. There will inevitably come a time when certain drugs and procedures will be denied to those who need them because they "cost the government too much."

Unfortunately, many of our colleagues have given up and given in. Many have adopted the attitude that "we might as well get the best deal we can" under the circumstances. Ethics and morality for them simply don't enter into the picture. But if Medicare was morally wrong and economically unwise before it was passed, surely making it law does not suddenly confer morality and economic sanity upon it.

But for those of us who abhor everything about this unwise and dangerous legislation, the only sane and moral response is to continue to strongly oppose it because it is wrong, and to make no apologies for where we stand.

Then there are those physicians who naively say we should just "cooperate" with the government, with the idea that government would not do anything to harm physicians or their patients. Vice President Hubert Humphrey says: "Doctors, let's be partners." Yet this is the same man who has steadfastly attacked the profession of medicine ever since he has been in public office. He and others from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare traveled the

country at taxpayer's expense, undermining and sabotaging the Kerr-Mills law. He and his entourage have done everything possible to plant distrust of physicians in the minds of our patients.

The lessons of public-private partnership in history are unmistakably clear. Their ultimate goal is to control, regulate and stifle the practice of private medicine. Partnering with government is a little like playing baseball with the umpire. The umpire makes all of the rules, is free to change them in the middle of the game, and owns all of the equipment. I, for one, would much rather work as hard as I can to show that a free and independent physician can outdistance a government bureaucrat any day of the week.

Men become free one man at a time, and likewise men lose their freedom, one man at a time. Despite what has been foisted upon us, only physicians can socialize themselves or refuse to do so, one man at a time. Some will give up their freedom willingly and so injure quality care for short-term gain, and others will simply wake up from their busy schedules one day and wonder how it all happened.

For those physicians with moral character and foresight, the answer is simple. It takes only one simple word to remain free: *No*. *No*, I will not participate in or accept assignment from any third party whatsoever, whether it be the federal government, local welfare, insurance company, labor union, or workmen's compensation program. *No*, I will not submit to an imposed fee schedule, no matter how enticing that schedule is to start.

At the same time, we should say *Yes* to continuing to provide our patients with the best medical care possible, with a commitment to charity for those who cannot afford medical services. *Yes*, I will continue to deal directly with my patients, as my patient is my one and only employer. And, I will assist my patient in providing information needed to receive reimbursement from his insurer, but I will not be party to the contract between patient and insurer. The patient will remain personally responsible for paying for his own personal medical care.

Nonparticipation, or personal responsibility, can solve the problem of third-party intrusion in medicine, whether it be Medicare or private insurance. Our safeguard is there in the Thirteenth Amendment to our Constitution, if only we agree to take a stand and not give up our hard-won rights. The Thirteenth Amendment prohibits involuntary servitude. That means that there is no rule or law under which any man in this country can be forced to serve with his labor any other man whom he does not wish to serve. To be a slave or not be a slave. It is our decision.

Equally important to our freedom is the right to private contracting guaranteed by our Constitution. The Constitution provides "the right to incorporate into their contracts such terms as may be mutually satisfactory to them. The right to mortgage property, the right to fix the price for personal services, and the right to decline to enter into a contract." It couldn't be more clear.

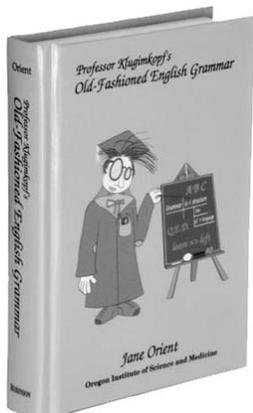
With rights, however, go responsibilities. As physicians, we have a unique opportunity to restore constitutional government by promoting the virtues of private medicine and by refusing to participate in the cornerstone of the welfare state, Medicare. Indeed, such is our honorable duty and responsibility. We must not allow the greatest success story of all time to be dishonorably exchanged for what has proven to be a miserable failure everywhere it has been tried.

Each of us must decide, one at a time, according to his own conscience. I know not what others will do, but as for me I have searched my heart and soul and I have reached my decision. I cannot and will not prostitute myself for a few pieces of silver nor will I compromise my principles to gain public favor. The words of Martin Luther strengthen my resolve and give me courage. He said: "Here I stand. I can do nothing less, God help me."

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