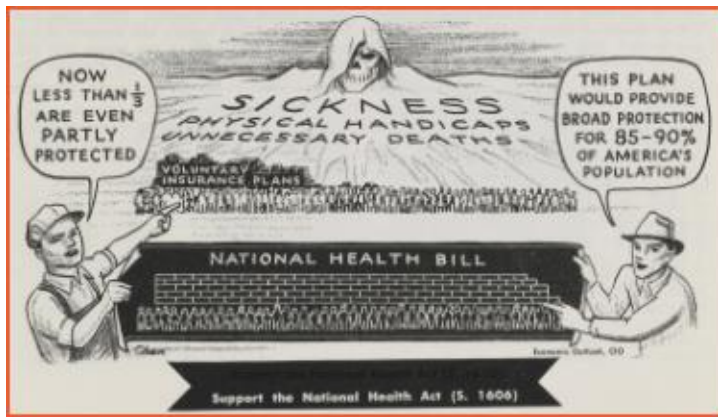


Background Essay on: National Healthcare Challenges of the Presidency



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To many Americans, healthcare is considered a human right. In fact, Harry S. Truman, 33rd president of the United States, said, “I put it to you, is it un-American to visit the sick, aid the afflicted or comfort the dying? I thought that was simple Christianity.” Harry Truman would carry on the legacy of FDR in trying to provide American men, women, children and elderly with national healthcare. Truman would pave the way for future presidents such as Lyndon Johnson, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, whose administrations strove toward the same goal.

In 1945, President Truman proposed a national healthcare plan to Congress. In his plan, he outlined five main goals:

1. Address the lack of trained healthcare professionals in all communities.
2. Grow public health services.
3. Increase funding to medical research and education.
4. Lower the cost of individual medical care.
5. Bring attention to the loss of income when severe illness takes hold.

Truman’s plan was that all Americans would pay a certain amount in fees and taxes each month to cover the new healthcare program’s costs. With a Democratic controlled house, Truman’s proposal turned into a bill that would end up as part of the Social Security expansion, but it was quickly shot down as people began to fear an increase in taxes. Some people even feared the program would be a “Communist” act, giving too much control to the federal government. This fear was spread specifically by the American Medical Association (AMA). The bill was also halted by Republican Senator Robert Taft’s Taft-Smith-Ball Bill, which would allow states to make healthcare private. As Republicans regained control of the House in 1946, Truman’s healthcare bill died. Truman considered this a failure of his presidency.

The United States would continue its fight for national healthcare during Lyndon B. Johnson’s presidency. Healthcare would be a critical point in Johnson’s “Great Society.” In 1965 in Independence, Missouri, President Johnson signed the Medicare Act of 1965 which would provide healthcare to U.S. citizens age 65 and older. President and Mrs. Truman were present at the signing, and President Johnson dubbed former President Truman “the real daddy of healthcare.” Johnson would also sign a Medicaid bill providing healthcare for low-income Americans.

We would see healthcare come to the forefront again during the Clinton administration. In 1993, President Bill Clinton would launch the Task Force on National Health Care Reform. President Clinton would place his wife and then First Lady, Hillary Rodham Clinton as the leader of the task force. For multiple reasons including the complexity of the bill, by 1994 the bill was dead and would not be a success.

National healthcare reform would be brought to the forefront again during the Obama Administration. Known as the Affordable Care Act of 2010, this act would require that individuals purchase a health care plan or face a penalty. While this bill was signed, there has been much opposition. The main reason for the opposition of President Obama's bill is that many disagree with a government role and mandates where healthcare is concerned. This is very similar to backlash against President Truman's, Clinton's and even Johnson's bills.

Harry S. Truman paved the way for healthcare reform in the United States, and criticisms against his bill have also remained throughout American history. Many presidents have followed in Truman's footsteps to try to provide what is considered a "universal human right" to all Americans. The question that remains is: What led to Truman's failure of passing a healthcare bill during his presidency?