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8-19-2009

August 19, 2009: What the Healthcare Debate Says About America

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Repository Citation

Ledewitz, B. (2009). August 19, 2009: What the Healthcare Debate Says About America. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/ledewitz-hallowedsecularism/323>

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Title: What the Healthcare Debate Says About America

Date: 2009-08-19T08:17:00.001-04:00

8/19/2009—The healthcare debate dominated the Netroots Nation convention. But what is that debate about? Healthcare is an important and complex issue. But it is not primarily an issue of social justice. Healthcare for the uninsured and for those who change jobs is a social justice issue, but those matters are addressed, to a certain extent at least, by all sides in the current debate. The controversy centers on matters such as the public option and end-of-life issues. If I may say, these are identity politics issues. They go to whether America is primarily a capitalist nation with social welfare aspects or a social welfare nation with capitalist aspects. The healthcare debate seems to be about the role of government, as have been most domestic debates since Ronald Reagan. As I sat listening to Dr. Howard Dean address healthcare at the Convention (there is no reform without the public option), I thought about what was not being addressed. The Convention was not engaged about global warming or about poverty. Healthcare in the end is about me—my costs, my health, my future. Global warming and poverty are about others. We were not even talking about the two wars our nation is fighting. Part of the reason America's healthcare costs are so high is our materialistic individualism. I can't bear to die because I am so unique. So, at the end of my life, when there is no hope of cure, I want all these tests and treatments. And I don't want anyone else to say, enough is enough. It's ridiculous and it shows that America is not nearly as religious as people think. Not really. (Even our religious beliefs are individualistic, centering on heaven in a way Jesus would not recognize). For a narcissistic country a healthcare debate is a perfect symbol. It's a debate in which each of us is number one.