

One of our Swedish friends had recent surgery. Some days later, her husband waited for her to have her stitches removed, and then they drove around the large hospital complex that was made up of many specialized clinics for various illnesses and procedures. The same phenomenon can be observed here around many large medical facilities. There is a great difference, though. Our friend put it this way: “Think what all of this has to cost: hundreds of doctors, nurses, nurses’ aides, kitchen facilities, laundry, pharmacy, and everything else possible and necessary, and we pay only 100 crowns (a little under 10 U.S. dollars) at Admission. Everything else we have paid through our taxes, people with little income pay less, people with high wages pay more, just as it should be. I don’t understand how anyone could think that it should be any other way.”

We don’t understand it, either. How can the U.S.A. be so far behind the rest of the world in caring for our people? Part of the answer, maybe the major part, can be found in a prevalent idea in some of this society—it sometimes goes by the name “zero sum”, but it basically is promoting the theory that anything that is good for me has to be negative for someone else, preferably someone I consider to be of lower class or race. Otherwise, I can’t support it. This idea goes back a long time, and when the Supreme Court declared school segregation unconstitutional in *Brown vs. the Board of Education* in 1954, one county in Virginia simply closed its public schools. This is an example of “zero sum” thinking. There were cities that closed public swimming pools when they were forced to desegregate them. The same apparently applies to thinking about health care. “I am not in favor of anything that helps people of another race or lower economic class, even though I would benefit from it myself.” It turns out that this is not only racist and detrimental to poor people of all races, it is also very expensive. In 2022, the U.S. spent an estimated \$12,742 per person on health care. Sweden, where our friend had surgery in the most advanced facilities, spent \$7009 per person the same year.

Sen. Bernie Sanders expresses our need for universal health care this way: “Health care is a human right.”

Historian Timothy Snyder, in his new book, *On Freedom*, explores this idea, too. He had a near fatal illness a few years ago, and a friend stopped in to see him and told the health care professionals what he needed. She was a doctor, but she was not in

her white coat and had no stethoscope hanging around her neck. And, she was Black. Nobody listened to her. Snyder is convinced that racism played a role, even if unconsciously. She didn't "look" enough like a doctor to be taken seriously.

Most of us, I believe, would really rather pay taxes for "health care for all" than for lower—or nonexistent—taxes for rich corporations and individuals. Why we do not rise up as a people and demand this is a mystery. But, perhaps, until we see all of our fellow Americans as worthy—including immigrants, people of other races than our own, and people who have other religions, gender identities, or life outlooks, we will never have the chance to experience a society where health care is a basic right for all.

By the way, even Putin's Russia has universal health care. Wonder what Trump and Musk think of that.