



## Podcast Transcript

# Thom Hartmann on Why Americans Need to Take Back Our Health Care, Like Yesterday!

**Dispatcher:** 911, what's your emergency?

**Caller:** America's healthcare system is broken and people are dying! (ambulance siren)

Welcome to **Code WACK!**, where we shine a light on our callous healthcare system, how it hurts us and what we can do about it. I'm your host **Brenda Gazzar**. This time on **Code WACK!** Why isn't there more mainstream media coverage on the real impact our for-profit healthcare system has on people? What can Americans do to take back their health care? We recently spoke to Thom Hartmann, America's No. 1 progressive talk radio show host and author of the book "[The Hidden History of American Health Care: Why Sickness Bankrupts You and Makes Others Insanely Rich.](#)"

**Welcome to Code WACK!, Thom.**

**Hartmann:** Well thank you, Brenda. It's great to be here.



***Q: So low-income Californians were recently surveyed by a commission set up by California Governor Gavin Newsom to explore options for a unified healthcare financing system in the state. To the commission's surprise, 65% of low-income residents surveyed not only want publicly financed healthcare, they want government-run healthcare. Meanwhile a common media narrative is that Americans LOVE their health insurance and are afraid of losing it. Do you have any thoughts on how we can get the mainstream media to report more on the real impact our for-profit system has on people?***

**Hartmann:** Well, as long as there are all these think tanks being funded by right-wing billionaires that are cranking out policy papers and whatnot -- this is in addition to the PR efforts of the health insurance industry -- but it's an ideology, this kind of neoliberal, neoliberal, neofascist, whatever you want to call it, ideology that government should never do anything other than run the army and the police and that's it. And therefore if you're going to have a national healthcare system, whether it's single payer or whatever, 'it's socialism and it's terrible and it's the road to the Soviet Union'

As long as we've got that problem, you're probably not going to hear an honest story out of the media because they're not being fed an honest story by and large. As long as you know fewer than a quarter of high school graduates in the United States took even one single civics course in all 12 years of their education, you're not going to have people understanding what government should do or could do -- what's the appropriate role of government.

I'm not a socialist -- as in Marxists -- I don't want the government making my blue jeans or my computers, you know, like in the old Soviet Union. I used to live next door to the



old Soviet Union. I lived literally across the street from East Germany. Guys with guns in towers pointing them at me when I take a walk. That is what the right wing billionaires, the think tanks are telling you will happen to us. This is what Ronald Reagan told us with the recording he made for the American Medical Association, in opposition to Medicare back in 1965 would happen to us if we got a single-payer healthcare system. It's a lie. It's just a lie. And, you know, we have a single-payer system. Medicare...We also have socialized medicine in the United States, which is the Veterans Administration, where the government actually owns the hospitals and pays the doctors so we have both. And surprise, surprise, the surveys that are done on the satisfaction with health care, the health care that is provided to you, the institution that has the highest level of satisfaction is the Veterans Administration, the socialized medicine in the United States, but there you go.

***Q: Got it. So what's the most important thing Americans can do today to take back their health care?***

**Hartmann:** Become politically active. This is a situation that we cannot individually solve. It's the reason why health care should be considered part of the commons. The commons is the stuff that government should have some province over. It's the stuff that none of us can do by ourselves or the place where the natural monopolies occur -- the fire department, police departments, the public schools, the roads, the air and the water, the highways. These are all things that none of us can do individually nor would we want to, you know, and health care falls into that category. It's too large for any of us. It's too large even for a community. It's probably too large for some small states. So this is the appropriate province of government -- health care, or at least the payment of health care. Eventually, I hope we get there. I think probably we will.



**Q: Got it. Makes sense. Thom, is there anything else you wanted to say?**

**Hartmann:** Yeah, you mentioned California going for a single-payer healthcare system. Vermont actually did that. Peter Shumlin was in the Senate. He ran for governor on a platform of single payer. He was elected. They passed it through the House and Senate in Vermont. He signed the legislation into law, hired a friend of mine to put it into place and what they discovered was that because back in '65, LBJ (Lyndon B. Johnson) was worried that if Medicare money was sent to the Southern states, they would take the money but refuse to serve Black people.

There's kind of an audit trail, I mean it's not literally that -- this is a huge generalization -- but there's kind of an audit trail with both Medicare and Medicaid from the federal government to the consumer, making sure that that money isn't getting diverted and that people who are supposed to get it are getting it. And the result of that, is that when Vermont said we're going to do a single-payer system, that would have broken that audit trail because now with a single-payer system, all the money's going into one pot, and then all the payments go out of that one pot, and there's not that individual dollar from DC being tracked to Ralph on Main Street.

And so Vermont would have ended up losing billions of dollars a year in money coming into the state for all of the people over 65 who are on Medicare, and billions of dollars coming into the state for low-income working people who are on Medicaid, and that would have just broken the state. There's no way they could have raised taxes enough to cover all of that to put in place a single-payer system. So what we need to be doing is contacting our legislators, our Senators and representatives in Congress and telling them to pass -- and Democrats keep introducing legislation to do this by the way, everybody will know what you're talking about when you say this-- ask them to pass



Medicare and Medicaid waivers for the states so that individual states can put into place single-payer health care systems. This is how Canada got their national healthcare system. It started with Tommy Douglas in Saskatchewan, you know Kiefer Sutherland's grandfather and it was in the 60s and it was so successful in Saskatchewan that Alberta wanted it and then British Columbia wanted it and then it went to Ontario and pretty soon, it just spread across the country. And then the federal government jumped in to backstop the individual provinces but it's still run by each of the individual provinces, the Medicare for All system that Canada has. And frankly, I think that that's probably the best way to do it in the United States.

It also allows the whole Jeffersonian laboratory of democracy idea of the states. You know states will innovate and other states will imitate and other states will make mistakes and other states will avoid those mistakes. That's all good stuff. So this is how I think we should do it. I think it's the optimal way to do it but we have to get that law changed so that the states with single-payer systems will still have access to Medicare and Medicaid dollars.

**Q: Got it. So do you think it's more likely that we'll do this on a state-by-state basis then?**

**Hartmann:** Absolutely.

**Okay.**

**Hartmann:** Yeah, trying to do it at a national level, you are confronting a trillion-dollar industry which the Supreme Court has said you can pour unlimited amounts of money into the political system. That's going to be a real challenge. Doing it on a state-by-state



basis where individual state voters, particularly the smaller states, like California has already jumped into this and New York is talking about it. But like I said Vermont passed it because it's a small state, it's retail politics. You know, you're gonna have to confront your voters because you live in the community. And you know, it's a whole lot harder to just take a whole pile of money from the healthcare industry and say no to people, you know, at a state than it is at the federal level.

***Thank you, Thom Hartmann.***

Remember to check out Thom's new book [\*"The Hidden History of American Health Care: Why Sickness Bankrupts You and Makes Others Insanely Rich"\*](#) and subscribe to [Code WACK!](#), your podcast about America's broken healthcare system on Apple podcasts or wherever you listen.

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