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The Road to Recovery

Reformers and the American Medical Association have been at odds about health-care policy for nearly a century.

□ 1921:

Women's groups like the League of Women Voters and the Women's Joint Congressional Committee work to pass the Sheppard-Towner Act, which allows the federal government to give aid to states for maternity and child health programs.

The AMA calls the act "socialized medicine" and opposes its renewal in 1927.

1935:

President Franklin Roosevelt signs the Social Security Act, which does not include health care.

A 1930s article in the Journal of the American Medical Association written by the publication's editor, Morris Fishbein, equates health insurance with "socialism, communism, inciting to revolution." Some scholars believe that AMA's powerful lobby against health insurance influenced the president's decision to leave it out.

□ 1949:

President Truman tries to implement a national health-care program that provides all communities with access to doctors and hospitals.

The AMA launches a campaign using Sir Luke Fildes's painting "The Doctor" and the slogan "Keep politics out of the picture."

1962:

President Kennedy pushes to extend Social Security to include health insurance for the elderly.

AMA runs "Operation Coffee Cup," a public relations campaign undertaken by the AMA Women's Auxiliary. The actor Ronald Reagan lends his support, records an LP called "Ronald Reagan Speaks Out Against Socialized Medicine."

□ 1993:

Hillary Clinton proposes a health-care reform package. In a speech to the AMA she suggests "a new bargain" in which the White House would limit malpractice lawsuits and free doctors from onerous rules if they lend their support.

The AMA opposes central elements of the plan, including federal regulation of insurance premiums, cuts in growth of Medicare and Medicaid.

2009:

President Barack Obama delivers a speech to the AMA about his proposals for health-care reform. In addition to calling for a public health insurance plan, he proposes a payment system that rewards doctors for the quality of the care they provide rather than the quantity.

An AMA statement says the organization supports health-care reform and “is committed to affordable, high quality health coverage for all Americans.”

—Juliet Chung and Abraham Verghese

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