

I am an American who grew up in the UK. I always had the idea that the United States stood for freedom, and could be an inspiration for the rest of the world in that regard. Now - as an Oregonian who has experienced both a national health service, and US healthcare - I am not so sure.

There are myriad reasons why a comprehensive, single payer healthcare system that is free at the point of service is a great idea: these range from moral to economic. Another reason is discussed less, but I believe it is fundamental to this debate.

Employer-sponsored health insurance covers close to half of all Americans (pre-pandemic that is), although the eventual healthcare provided to these workers and their families is often expensive and inadequate. Having health insurance tied to work means that potentially millions of Americans feel compelled to remain in jobs that they do not like because they are afraid of losing their healthcare.

This might be a person who wants to make a career switch, but cannot because they have a chronic condition, such as diabetes, where being without insurance could be a death sentence.

It might be a worker who wants to start a small business, but has to put their aspirations on hold so that their family is covered.

It means that individuals who would like to devote themselves to artistic pursuits, or to serving their community, must have their creativity stifled, or their altruism untapped, because they cannot afford health insurance.

What is the effect of being trapped in a job to preserve health benefits? It is intangible, but we can guess that the quashing of dreams does not make Americans healthier.

The present system, then, means that ordinary, working Americans are less free than their counterparts in countries that guarantee adequate healthcare to their citizens. And the overwhelming majority of people in those countries would not trade their health services for the American model because they would see it as an infringement of their liberties, among other huge drawbacks.

Oregon has the chance to set an example to the rest of the nation by liberating its people from expensive, inadequate healthcare. I urge the passage of SJR12 so that Oregon's voters have the freedom to decide for themselves.