

Op-Ed Submission
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The Right to Bare Arms (and Buttocks)

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I want an amendment to the Constitution of the United States: the right to bare arms.

No, not the right to ‘bear’ arms- arguably, that one is covered. No, the right to bare arms, or buttocks for that matter, and receive life-saving, disease-preventing immunization at no personal cost. Nor do I want my right limited to limbs, and vaccines. Oh, no.

I want my right to extend from ischial tuberosities to the occipital protuberance; from the coccyx up to the cranium, and back down to the calcaneus. Head to toe, in other words. And I want it to extend to all of the variations on the theme of fundamental health care, protective of life and limb.

Our right to free speech has Constitutional protection; but not so the organs that generate speech. Our right to bear arms is, ostensibly, protected- but not so the arms that do the bearing. Our right to assemble is protected- but not so the limbs that get us to the assembly.

Endowed as we are with the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness- we lack the inalienable right to treatment that will save our life; defense against the incarceration of chronic disease that robs us of all liberty; or the basic care of health without which, happiness is not just unattainable, but downright unpursuable.

Basic human decency and our prevailing standards of morality already recognize basic health care as a right. No decent person could favor leaving the victim of a shark attack to bleed while we sorted out their insurance status. The moral mandate to care transcends party affiliation, capitalism, or any ideology. It issues from humanism- and we are all human.

Naturally, an inalienable right to care cannot extend limitlessly in all directions. The life threatening shark attack would surely be covered; so, too, would the shark attack posing threat to just limb but not life. A sand flea bite to the toe starts to get rather questionable. A face lift after too many days on the beach is clearly over the line.

But all rights are the first step onto a slippery slope, and we’ve found the traction we need to avoid the downhill slide in other areas. Our right to free speech is protected, but bounded- hate speech is off the reservation. The right to health care would need bounds, too. Setting them would not be easy, but it would certainly be possible. Better to debate where to draw a line than to line up behind the wrong debate. Whether or not to provide universal access to health care should not be in question.

But it is, and that’s why I want a Constitutional amendment.

The intense debate over how to provide every American with access to basic health care more or less obliterates the underlying issue: don’t we have to? Consequently, arguments about how to reform could yet result in simply not doing so- and leaving us stuck with a morally deficient status quo and some 50 million of our fellow humans uninsured, and unprotected. It has happened before- repeatedly- and could again, despite President Obama’s commitment and clout.

That would be a disaster, but not an unconstitutional disaster. I say, make it an unconstitutional disaster, and then we will be obligated by law to succeed, one way or another.

As things now stand, our policies and our morals are misaligned. Time to make amends- or amendments, as the case may be.

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