
COMMON SENSE II

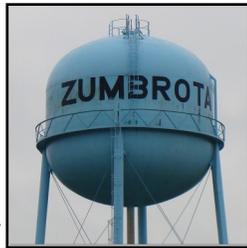
Capitalizing on the familiarity and influence of Thomas Paine’s “Common Sense” pamphlets that provided American colonists with exposure to the conversation of great thinkers in the pre-Revolutionary period, this paper assumes the name COMMON SENSE II. Similarly, today’s series of pamphlets strives to give a direct response to great political events and ideas of our time.

March 2019 Democratic Socialism Issue Volume 14 Issue 3

Columnist’s Policy of 1946 Still Good Today

By Eric Grimsrud

This piece is based on an editorial that I have retrieved from the archives of a weekly newspaper in Minnesota. First, a confession: the columnist being referred to here is my father, Alton Tacitus (AT) Grimsrud, who had just purchased the weekly newspaper of Zumbrota, Minnesota, in a prosperous rural and largely Republican area just north of Rochester. While I was only two years old at that time, I have occasionally looked up the archives of the *Zumbrota News* in order to see AT’s take on the issues of his time.



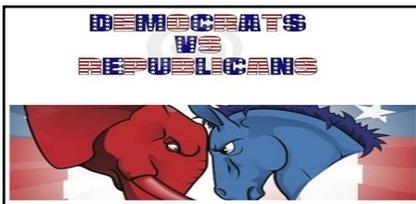
AT spent his entire life in journalism—from age 13 when he started an apprenticeship under his uncle at the *Westby Times* of Westby, Wisconsin, to age 87 when he posted his last column at the *Zumbrota News*. He learned much about that profession as well as Midwestern politics at the University of Wisconsin and the *Capital Times* of Madison. After a couple decades spent at the newspapers of Viroqua and Turtle Lake, Wisconsin, he arrived in Zumbrota, Minnesota, where his four children would grow up and his descendants would continue to run that newspaper to this day,



On October 4, 1946, AT wrote the following editorial for his new paper:

An editorial column ought to have a political policy. As to this, your editor cherishes the rare privilege of the free press. We don’t believe in committing blank check approval of any political party and then

have to swallow all policies or persons of said party. The Republican Party, to which most of our readers no doubt adhere, is by tradition and present commitment devoted to reducing government expenditures. Yet, any impartial poll of Republicans, as well as Dem-



ocrats, would show that an overwhelming majority are members of some pressure group employing hired lobbies at Washington and St. Paul to get from Congress or the legislature a slice of tax money for his or her personal interest. We have the powerful veterans lobby, the farm lobby, a variety of business lobbies, the labor union lobbies, railroad and highway lobbies. A story in the *Minneapolis Tribune* Sunday under a Washington dateline said that pressure groups’ hired lobbies tapped Uncle Sam for five billion dollars this year. A federal handout for me but not for you is a too common fallacy by which Americans of all parties hope to balance the budget.



So it appears that a newspaper with a definite party line has nothing but “skeletons in the closet” to plague it, thereby eventually losing whatever “kick” there is in the week-in-and-out attempt to be a sincere if not always expert judge of political leaders and issues.

We can offer as a safe guide to *[The Zumbrota/News]* political policy the assertion that government is best which creates a well-balanced economy, infinitely superior to that government which aims only to govern the least. If a lot of the fog that clouds the vision of American citizens could be swept away, the bogeys of communism and reaction which liven up political campaigns would become the ghosts which they are, and we could promptly pattern our politics after the most efficient democracy in the world today—Sweden.

The greatest lesson I learned from AT is not to base one’s opinions on the superficial labels both parties sling at each other in order to win cheap votes. We must carefully consider the ideas coming from all corners and then select our preferences via the procedures provided by our representative democracy. While that sentence might sound a bit too obvious to merit mention in our 200+ year old republic, recent decades have shown that it is not. How many times do we have to witness American political leaders losing their respect for our representative democracy and imposing their own wills via autocratic means? By my count, that number is at least three in the post-Viet Nam era with another now possible underway.

I Have Always Called Myself a Socialist

By Deanna Ensley

*The actual definition of socialism: An economic system in between capitalism and communism, advocating collective ownership of the means of production and distribution of goods. In the many years since socialism entered English around 1830, it has acquired several different meanings. It refers to a system of social organization in which private property and the distribution of income are subject to social control, but the conception of that control has varied, and the term has been interpreted in widely diverging ways, ranging from statist to libertarian, from Marxist to liberal. In the modern era, "pure" socialism has been seen only rarely and usually briefly in a few Communist regimes. Far more common are systems of social democracy, now often referred to as democratic socialism, in which extensive state regulation, with limited state ownership, has been employed by democratically elected governments (as in Sweden and Denmark) in the belief that it produces a fair distribution of income without impairing economic growth.**

I have always called myself a socialist; I guess more appropriately I am a democratic socialist. In about 1971, I read Saul D. Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals* which sent me on that path. I grew up in a company town where most things were very equal; that fact alone made me recognize that that equality gave some promise of success for all. The "company" is a government entity, a hydro-electric project in an extremely remote location. We were given generous incentives, social type programs, to retain employees and maintain peace among the small town's population. We had mostly equal company houses which the company provided including power and heat. Our dads all worked on the project, and most had similar wages. We lived mostly in harmony in an almost perfect neighborhood. Still, I grew up to be very much a unique, stand-alone individual. The first person in my extended family to attend college, I attended a very liberal "experimental education hippie" college much to the dismay of many.



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A person who believes in socialism often believes that all of society and the government have a obligation to the population to provide certain rights such as health insurance and education as well as equality regardless of race, religion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, etc. as long as they do no harm to others. I am a socialist in that I see all people as equal and believe that they should have equal rights plus the idea that we should be working together for the betterment of the country and society. Socialists are usually empathetic people who prefer to help other people versus watching them go downhill. I have lived among people of low to moderate means most of my life and have seen the unfair treatment of those with little

money and education. As I have aged, I have come to realize that I am empathetic to most people and the situations in which they find themselves. This empathy for people and their situations does not mean I necessarily believe or that I am convinced that they have followed common sense or standard behavior to get into their situation. I just have the patience to attempt to help them out of their situation, if they will accept assistance.

A socialist often realizes that life is not fair and, far from black and white, that the poor are not always "lazy," unlike the attitude of many conservatives who express their high

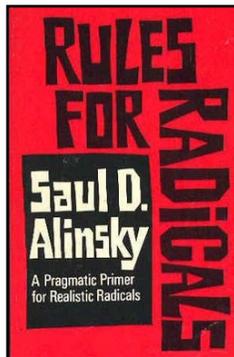
and mighty perception of right and wrong. The Right tends to insult those who call themselves socialists by saying that "they want our hard-earned money to sit on their asses and not be productive." These claims are completely unfounded, as most-socialistic countries have below 1% unemployment as opposed to capitalistic nations. The point is equal distribution of wealth helps to alleviate poverty.

Key among socialists is the belief that the duties of the state are to the individual and in reverse, the individual has duties to the state. A person who believes in the principles of socialism believes power rests with the state and the individual's rights are second to those of the mass of people, which is the state.

Socialism differs from Communism in that under a socialistic government, one need not be an atheist. The system and deliberation of labor are also different within a socialistic society: one is free to choose his/her occupation which leads to people doing what they're good at, leading to more productivity and happiness, as opposed to a dead end job and the dissatisfaction a less than desired job can cause. I have worked many jobs but still completed a 28 1/2 year career with state government. Working for the government actually expanded my ability to have several very successful and meaningful positions. Working for the government and taking advantage of its offerings expands your life while placing you in a position to be of service to society and leads you to understand how socialist/state/government programs can produce fair distribution of income without impairing economic growth. If we could just get more people to understand good democratic socialists are good business people but not great capitalists.

[*www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com)

"Since when did it become radical to expect giant profitable corporations to pay their workers enough to live without food stamps? Taxpayers are subsidizing companies like Walmart. That isn't real capitalism; it's socialism for the rich."
--Nick Hanauer, Venture Capitalist
Storm is Coming



Serving Society

By Bob Passi

A Fable

The old bus that they had depended upon for years was no longer working the way it used to and was not exactly reliably getting them to their preferred destinations anymore.

They had tried everything that the official instruction book suggested and had consulted with the official engineers who had designed the bus and its engine. Something was wrong even though all of the experts were telling them that it should be working just fine.



Then one of the mechanics said he had a solution to make the bus work better and make the engine not only work well again but also make it work more efficiently than it had before. Everyone could see the logic of it made perfect sense and could see no reason why it wouldn't work. They were all excited to try it and solve the problem.

But then one of the leaders spoke up and reminded everyone where this solution came from. It had come from Joe Becker, and he was from the wrong side of the tracks. He was one of the people who were



unhappy about how that old bus had been working for his family and his friends and actually thought that a newer, different bus might serve the purpose better.

Because he was from the wrong side of the tracks, as his family had been for years and was not exactly acceptable in polite society, it was clear that any solution he—or “his kind”—might suggest could not possibly be helpful, and that “his kind” could not be trusted or have any helpful ideas.

So, they rejected not only his solutions, but they also had his ideas wiped from the official record and never allowed them even to be discussed or brought up. To finish the process, he was fired for having the gall to even think he was allowed to suggest any solution at all.

They knew they were much better off just continuing with the old bus, insisting that it was exactly what they needed and was operating in exactly the way that was required for the success of the society.

MORAL: Solutions from the wrong kinds of people are worse than no solutions at all. Only solutions from within the prevailing system can ever be considered. Purity is more important than mere workable solutions.

Democracy is a system of governance grounded in the participation of all the people within a society, in our case it is constructed by electing representatives who are to give voice to the needs and desires of those who elected them.

That does not always work out as it should, and the system is corrupted often by money to seduce the elected representatives away from serving their constituents.

It is also important to recognize that there are three main modern economic systems that operate within and act as the underpinnings of any system of governance wherever it is located on the scale from democracy to autocracy



Those three economic systems are capitalism, socialism, and communism. Of those three systems only one, capitalism, is not founded on a democratic base. In fact, pure capitalism, in many ways, works best without the restraints of democracy.

Once a society has chosen a system of governance, it then chooses an economic system that will provide the necessary support to keep that system of governance viable. That economic system, in reality, is almost never pure, i.e. it does not follow the original theory of one prevailing system. So to get a democracy to work for the benefit of all the citizens, there is a

Form of Government	Description of Governmental Form
totalitarianism	total governmental control
authoritarianism	micromanagement of citizens via government structure; military control, tyranny
monarchy	rule of one; undivided rule; typically hereditary rule; backed by oligarchical power
oligarchy	rule of few (well-connected, socially, financially, physically powerful); elites rule
republic	indirect rule of citizens through representatives; rule of law; limited government
direct democracy	rule of citizens; simple majority rule; no restraint on majority
anarchy	no order/control; no government structure; power vacuum

need to have public functions that the populace controls and which provide the basic needs of the citizenry and is not connected with any need for profit making. There is often also a sector in which a free capitalistic and entrepreneurial spirit can thrive. Finally, there is a need for cohesive and sustainable social connections with all the people—a kind of national unity—to provide a clear ideal and give energy to the society.

When we have people telling us that a society must follow the pure theory of one economic system or another, we run into inefficiencies and breakdowns and often drift into a more authoritarian form of governance.

To adapt and survive, to be sustainable, a society must be able to choose from the combined tool chest of options that all of the systems offer. Finding workable solutions is far more important than any kind of ideological purity. Making decisions based on ideological purity will rule out many voices that might provide practical and workable options that will help any society maintain its vitality and its sustainability.

Of course, there is always the temptation by those who are heavily invested in one of the economic systems to demonize those ideas that do not conform to their choice system. Once demonized, all ideas and people connected to any other system can be ignored and rejected out of hand. Only pure solutions can be allowed, even if they simply allow the problems to persist or even make those problems worse.

Once stuck in that quandary, a society will even be asked to follow the true believers over the cliff as the final proof of their faith, loyalty, and ideological purity. Martyrs to the cause.

Ubuntu for All

By Mary Drewes

A few weeks ago, someone posted an inspiring African tale entitled “Ubuntu” on our DFL website. For those of you who didn’t happen to read it, it was a story about an anthropologist proposing a game to African tribal children. The story goes like this:

*He places a basket of sweets near a tree
And made the children stand 100 meters away.
Then announced that whoever reaches first
Would get all the sweets in the basket.
When he said, “Ready, steady, go,”*

*Do you know what these children did?
They all held each other’s hands, ran together
Toward the tree, divided the sweets and enjoyed it.
When the Anthropologist asked them why they did so,
They answered, “Ubuntu.”
Which meant—
“How can one be happy when the others are sad?”*

Let all of us always have this attitude and
Spread happiness wherever we go.

Reading a story of spreading happiness wherever we go makes one feel good and even wish that we in our Western culture were a little more socialist in our thinking.

Oops, did I say “socialist” and “DFL” in the same sentence? Indeed I did! But consider that these little Ubuntu thinkers,



who undoubtedly live in poverty, could not be enticed to put personal gain before the common good. We readily acknowledge that our children in the West have not been socialized in this same way, but do we make a mistake by refusing to consider that we could learn from one

another? Could the merging of Eastern and Western thinking be beneficial to both cultures?

Author and Buddhist spiritualist Thich Nhat Hanh believes that the encounter between Buddhism and the West will bring about something very exciting, very important. There are important values in Western society, such as the scientific way of looking at things, the spirit of free inquiry, and democracy. He gives the example of tea which comes from Asia but was put into tea bags by the West. Printing was started in China but only became a means of communication when in the hands of the Germans. We could greatly improve our quality of life if we opened ourselves to learning from recent immigrants from the East, from places such as Vietnam, Somalia, and Afghanistan. Capitalism has made us the wealthiest nation in the world but not the happiest.



The Most Important Part of Democratic Socialism

By Nancy Rudd

Democratic Socialism means different things to different people, but it is incorrectly equated with Communism. It is also incorrect to assume it is like Europe’s social democracies. Some of the tenets of Democratic Socialism of America are

- ◆ Workers should control the means of production,
- ◆ Government regulations are helpful in a capitalist society,
- ◆ Everyone is entitled to a certain minimum standard of living,
- ◆ Labor unions are a positive force,
- ◆ The whole healthcare industry should be socialized and funded by a single payer government system with doctors being public employees,

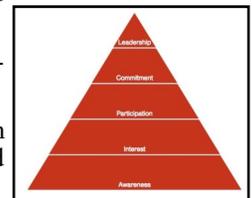
According to a Maggie Astor article in the September 22, 2018 *New York Times*, “Are You a Democratic Socialist?,” the Democratic Socialists of America is the “largest socialist organization in the United States,” and “forty DSA candidates won primaries this year. Eight others were nominated after running unopposed.”

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC), the youngest woman in the House, who upset a ten term Democrat who was chair of the House Democratic Caucus, identifies as a Democratic Socialist. She has hit the ground running and is getting a lot of attention. Along with Sen. Ed Markey of Massachusetts, AOC introduced the Green New Deal Resolution on February 7, 2019.

In addition to high profile Congressional Representatives, the DSA gets its message across through grass roots organizing. They believe in participation by voting; “they believe the way they obtain change is through mass mobilization and organizing.” (Astor, 9/22/18 p. 2).

As a reminder, grassroots organizing involves:

- ◆ Building power by finding groups that share the same problems
- ◆ Identifying targets that make solutions possible
- ◆ Engaging with their targets through negotiations, confrontation, and pressure
- ◆ Effectively using social media to generate wide-range support.



We’ve seen the end results of many grassroots organizing, especially since Trump has been in the White House. There is much more to effective grassroots organizing. There is an explanation of this graph on “The Pyramid of Engagement.”

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Editor: Valerie Conner conray@arvig.net

ITASCA PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS

Chair: Jeanne Newstrom itascaprogressive@gmail.com

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Fear Not

By Valerie Conner

To those of us who lived through the Cold War, the popular concept of Communism is dark, ominous, and even scary. Even the thought of socialism may give some of us pause. Those who are too young to remember the Soviet Union as an existential threat to the U. S. as we know (knew) it see socialism, especially democratic socialism in a more rational light. Maybe that's why now Democrats are more willing to say "democratic socialism" out loud. As the rest of this newsletter indicates, the understanding of what capitalism, socialism, democratic socialism, democracy, and communism all mean is varied.

Acknowledging that these terms indeed mean differing things to different people, we can at least understand a few basics. First, democracy and tyranny are systems of government. Theoretically, they can exist with any kind of economic system. Capitalism, various forms of socialism, and communism are economic systems and, again theoretically, can exist with any kind of governmental system. In any case, none of either economic or governmental systems can exist in its pure form.

Capitalism, for example, says its organizing principle is enterprise, either free or private. That is, the means of production are in non-governmental hands. Free enterprise has no regulatory restraints which leads inevitably to market manipulation, raping of the environment, and general abuse of advantage. Private enterprise keeps the means of production in non-governmental hands but has governmental restraints to protect the public, the environment, and honest competitors.

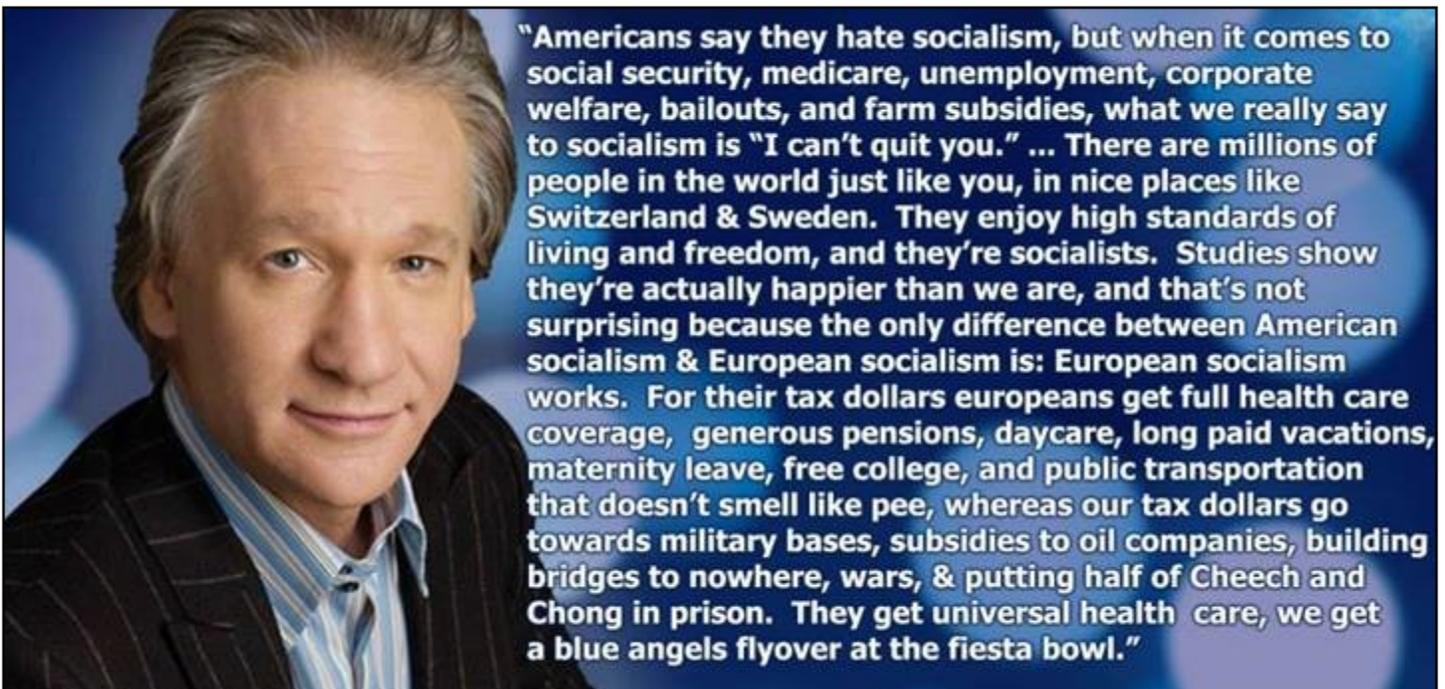
It would be impossible for capitalism to exist in its pure form. Imagine if each company had to build its own roads, communication systems, and other infrastructure. Governments regulate certain industries and allow them to be monopolies so the competition doesn't weaken the survival of all the companies. That's why utilities are heavily regulated. Even insurance companies are regulated so they don't undercut their competitors' prices to the point they go belly up and leave their customers without the protections they've paid for.

Communism depends on all means of production being held by the public. Marx envisioned the public to mean the workers would be in charge. Any Marxist experiments haven't quite worked out that way. Instead the government took over the duty to plan, regulate, and manipulate the entire economy. Cutting out any decision-making by the public makes it easier. As people lose their autonomy, they get harder to rule, leading to harsher governmental control. One way to fight the system is to do the minimum. Without the incentive to get ahead by hard work, the economy becomes sluggish. To counter this, the government turns a blind eye to individual enterprise, whether it be garden plots or the black market. Cuba depended on this.

Since neither capitalism nor communism is without flaws, it is necessary to look to a middle ground. Socialism is that middle ground. A good socialistic society is essentially democratic, so the people have a say in the decisions being made on their behalf. It also draws from capitalism what private enterprise does better and from the collective model what group or social endeavors do best. The question becomes which endeavors should draw from which system.

This is the basis of the difference between the Democratic and Republican Parties. Republicans want as little governmental "interference" as possible in people's lives (unless it's their sex lives). The problem is that not everyone has the ability or means to play on that slanted playing field. Without enforcement of regulations, most people can't afford to sue or otherwise seek redress of their grievances. That gives the "powers that be" even more power to do even more unfair deeds. Democrats recognize that laws help level the playing field and give everyone a better chance. Not everyone can afford private security guards or fire departments or road builders or schools or food inspectors or dispute mediators. They see the value in social safety nets as an advantage to all.

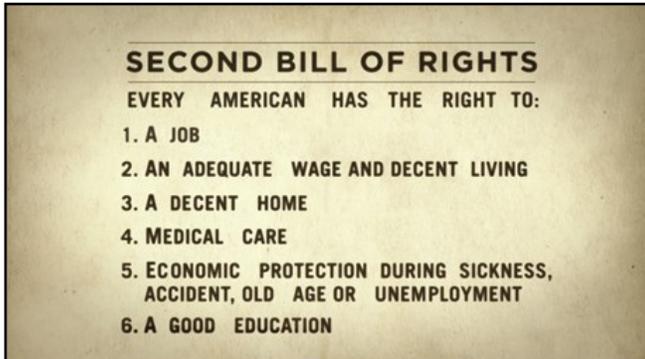
The question then is not whether we want a capitalistic or a communist society; it is where on the continuum between the two extremes we should be. That is a legitimate debate to have. We can only have that debate if we shed the boogie man fears we've been taught and look at the world as we would like it with open minds and clear eyes. As FDR put it so well, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."



An Old Idea Is New Again

By Stephen Fuller

It was January 11, 1944, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt was giving his State of the Union Address when he outlined what has come to be called the Second Bill of Rights. Here are the main points to FDR's proposal, guaranteeing everyone's right to:



FDR was quickly labeled a Socialist by the opposition, a label that FDR staunchly denied. Now the entire Democratic Party is being labeled socialist by Republicans to establish a talking point for the upcoming 2020 election.

So far most of the candidates have endorsed Medicare-for-All, which has been vilified by Republicans as socialized medicine. It is not socialized medicine, and Democrats need to point that out whenever the subject comes up in debate or conversation.

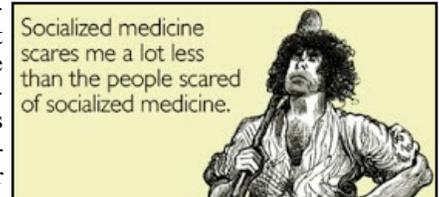


For the Medicare system to be socialized medicine, Medicare would have to own the hospitals and clinics and hire the medical staff. Instead, Medicare just handles the money, much like a for profit health insurance company does.

ance company does.

At this time Medicare enrollees join at age 65 and pay a premium into the Medicare system. Additionally all working Americans pay a small tax (1.45%) into the Medicare system as part of their Social Security tax. This provides a huge pool of dollars that are paid out to providers of health services: hospitals, clinics, doctors in private practice. Medicare is not socialized medicine but provides the same service that private health insurance providers do, just at a lower cost since its administrative costs are significantly less because there are no overpaid executives and marketing costs are minimal.

The right to Medicare has become a talking point for wannabe candidates, yet when it is labeled as socialized medicine, there has been a failure to define what socialized medicine really is. Republicans of all stripes will use that argument over and over again as a scare tactic. Over the years people have been programmed to fear "socialized medicine" without knowing or even questioning what it is. Unless Democrats speak up and at least attempt to correct the myths, universal healthcare will remain a pipe dream. FDR proposed universal healthcare more than eight decades ago, but it won't happen until the American people want it for themselves and their neighbors regardless of the label.



It's MEMBERSHIP TIME!!

Send your \$20-\$25 check to:
 Itasca Progressive Caucus
 DFL Office
 809 NE 4th St.
 Grand Rapids, MN 55744

CALENDAR OF EVENTS—GET INVOLVED AND GET IT DONE!

<u>Event</u>	<u>Date /Time</u>	<u>Location</u>
DFL Headquarters Open (326-6296)	Tues & Thurs 2-5 pm	DFL Headquarters
Itasca Progressive Caucus (259-4490)	3rd Monday 6:30 pm	DFL Headquarters
DFL Central Committee Meets	4th Monday 6:30 pm	DFL Headquarters
DFL Social Club & Lunch	1st Wednesday Noon	DFL Headquarters
DFL Pot Luck (Open to the Public)	3rd Wednesday 5:30 pm	DFL Headquarters
Earth Circle	3rd Saturday 2:00 pm	GR Public Library
Itasca Working families Alliance	2nd Monday 6:30 pm	Dutchroom
Itasca Indivisible	2nd Tuesday 7:00 pm	Dutchroom
GR Human Rights Commission	Last Wednesday 4:00 pm	GR City Hall
GR Healthcare for All	1st Thursday 5:00-6:00 m	DFL Headquarters
Circles of Support	Every Thursday 6:30 pm	811 NE 4th St.
Deadline for <i>Common Sense II</i>	April 5, 2019	conray@arvig.net