

# Healthcare and Guns; What Do They Have in Common?

By

**Alan M. Preston, MHA, Sc.D.**

As the Presidential debates move on, we frequently hearing a theme about healthcare and how healthcare is a “RIGHT”. Some candidates have suggested that by virtue of being born, you have a “right” to healthcare. This is an emotionally appealing argument for the supporters and often a difficult concept for opponents to refute.

We hear the word RIGHTS; however, what does the word actually mean? In the Declaration of Independence, the document starts off with the following:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain *unalienable Rights*, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Our countries’ founders believed that our “rights” come from a power other than the government. That all people are endowed by certain “unalienable” Rights by our Creator and not the Federal Government. Unalienable suggest rights that cannot be taken away from citizens and, since the government did not give them, the government therefore cannot take them away. At least that is the theory! Many tyrannical governments in other countries take these “unalienable Rights” away all the time.

Our Constitution was ratified on September 17<sup>th</sup>, 1787, some eleven plus years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence. James Madison wanted to make sure that our unalienable rights were also in the constitution in order to protect the citizens from the very government they created. It was not until December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1791 that the original “Bill of Rights” were adopted and made a part of the Constitution.

For anyone who has read the Constitution, the word “healthcare” cannot be found anywhere in that document. It is not in the Bill of Rights. Some people assert that “healthcare” is indeed one of those “unalienable Rights” that was found in the Declaration of Independence and should extend to the constitution and thus the citizens. Fair enough! Then let’s make this assumption for now.

The next question is what do we mean by “healthcare”? Some people think it is free health insurance. Some may think it means being entitled to receive any and all care demanded regardless of ability to pay for it. Other people think it is an entitlement to be protected from any and all harmful substances that we breath, or eat, or come across. What does it really mean to have a “right” to healthcare? There are many different definitions that may vary with many more of us. Thus there is no universal definition as to what a right to healthcare actually means.

Let’s compare the right of health care with gun rights. Let’s look at the “Rights” we do have in the Constitution. The Bill of Rights has quite a list of rights. The second amendment provides the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, and that right shall not be infringed. Now whether or not you support gun ownership is not the primary issue here. The issue is that this is one of many rights in our constitution and the Bill of Rights exist to protect the “people” from the government trying to take away such rights. Thomas Jefferson said it best when he said:

“When governments fear the people, there is liberty. When the people fear the government, there is tyranny”.

Nowhere in the constitution does it suggest that the Federal Government has to PAY for you to enjoy such a right. Imagine that I wanted to purchase a beautiful revolver that cost \$1,200.00. I reached into my pockets and I am shy by an amount of \$1,100.00. Should I go to congress and DEMAND that they pay for the revolver I am interested in? I could say it is my right and the fact I cannot afford it suggest I am being denied my right to bear arms as protected in the 2<sup>nd</sup> amendment of our Constitution.

Now whether you are a democrat or republican, I suspect both would tell me that it is not the obligation of the federal government to pay for one to enjoy their right to the extent they want to exercise such. And I would agree with them. However, when it comes to healthcare, and even assuming healthcare was a protected right under the Constitution, it does not suggest that the government has an obligation to pay for you to enjoy such a right. And like gun ownership, affordability is a different concept than the right itself. Many people too often confuse the word “RIGHT” with “ENTITLEMENT” of payment to enjoy such a Right.

Thus, even if healthcare were a Right and all agreed upon a definition, that right does not suggest that the government has to pay for it. No more than the right to bear arms suggest that the government has to pay for gun ownership. The rights have not gone away just because you have chosen not to budget for it. There is a huge difference between the concept of a right and the funding for someone to enjoy their right. It is clear that just because the government, or anyone else, fails to pay for you to enjoy your rights, your rights are **NOT denied!**