

Both Sides of the Issue

Medicare for All Revisited

A MiniGuide for Teachers

stosselintheclassroom.org

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Objectives

Students will be able to:

- outline what each video says is wrong with the current U.S. health care system.
- trace the reasoning each side uses to move from that shared diagnosis to opposite remedies.
- investigate where the cost, coverage, and polling figures cited in the two videos come from, and whether the original sources say what the videos say they do.
- recommend an approach to paying for health care that draws evidence from both videos and answers the strongest objection to it.

About This Pairing

This pairing sets a two-minute excerpt from a Senator Bernie Sanders speech against an animated episode of Common Sense Soapbox, a series written by Seamus Coughlin and Sean W. Malone and published by the Foundation for Economic Education (FEE). Sanders argues that the way to fix American health care is to take private insurance out of the middle. The Common Sense Soapbox episode argues that the bill would be unpayable, that most of Europe does not do what Americans think it does, and that the cheaper fix is to remove government rules that hold the supply of care down.

Two things are worth pointing out to students before they watch.

First, the two speakers agree on the diagnosis. Sanders says plainly that the question “is not whether or not our current health care system is broken” and that “no one disagrees on that.” The Common Sense Soapbox narrator says the American system “is definitely far from perfect.” The argument is about the cause and the cure, not about whether something is wrong. That makes this an unusually clean pairing for teaching students to separate a diagnosis from a prescription.

Second, neither video is a debate, and that shapes what students hear. The Sanders clip is an excerpt from a speech delivered to a supportive audience. The Common Sense Soapbox episode is an animated dialogue, which means the same writers supplied the lines for both characters. In neither case does a speaker face a follow-up question or an opponent able to push back. Students should be asked to notice that.

A note on dates. The Common Sense Soapbox episode was posted in June 2022 and uses figures from 2021. The Sanders clip was posted in December 2025. Several numbers in this pairing have moved since they were first cited, which makes the pairing a good place to teach students to check the date on a statistic before repeating it and to look for more recent figures.

Concepts & Key Terms

The following terms appear across both videos in this pairing, or in the activities that follow. Understanding them will help students follow the arguments and engage in discussion.

Certificate of Need: A state law requiring a hospital or clinic to obtain government permission before building a new facility, adding beds, or buying major equipment.

Framing: The wording chosen to present a question or a policy, which can change how people answer even when the underlying facts stay the same.

Hybrid System: A health care system in which a taxpayer-funded public plan operates alongside private insurance that residents may buy in addition to it, or instead of it.

Medicaid: A taxpayer-funded program, run jointly by the federal government and the states, that pays for medical care for people with low incomes.

Medicare: A taxpayer-funded federal program that pays for medical care mainly for people age sixty-five and older, and for certain younger people with disabilities.

Medicare for All: A proposal to replace most private health insurance with a single taxpayer-funded government plan covering every resident.

National Health Expenditures: The total a country spends on health care in a year from every source combined—government, employers, insurers, and households—which is a different figure from what the federal budget alone pays out.

Per Capita: Per person; a total divided by the number of people, used to compare countries of different sizes.

Price Control: A legal limit on what may be charged for a good or a service.

Primary Source: An original record of a finding, such as a study, a government agency's own data, or a survey report, rather than an article describing it.

Progressive Tax: A tax that takes a larger share of income from people who earn more.

Prompt: The question or instruction a person types into an artificial intelligence (AI) assistant, which shapes the answer that comes back.

Rationing: Limiting how much of a scarce good or service each person may receive, whether by price, by waiting, or by an official rule.

Single-Payer: A system in which one entity, usually the government, pays for nearly all medical care.

Underinsured: Having health insurance that still leaves out-of-pocket costs high enough to keep a person from getting care he or she needs.

Uninsured: Having no health insurance coverage at all.

Discussion Questions

Before watching, have students read through the questions below. After viewing both videos, use the questions to guide discussion—in small groups, as a whole class, or in writing. Encourage students to weigh the evidence on both sides before forming a view.

1. What percentage of Americans does Sanders say support Medicare for All?
2. How many Americans does he say are uninsured or underinsured?
3. How much more per person does Sanders say we spend than other nations?
4. What does Sanders say happens to some people diagnosed with cancer?
5. Who does Sanders say profits from health care?
6. What ten-year cost does the Soapbox video give, and what share of the federal budget is that?
7. Which European countries does the Soapbox video say are not truly single-payer?
8. Name the four government actions the Soapbox video says raise the price of care.
9. Both videos say the system is broken. So what are they arguing about?
10. Sanders blames private profit. The Soapbox video blames government rules. What does each assume makes care expensive?
11. Both videos say America already spends enormous sums on health care. Why does each think that proves its point?
12. Nothing is free. Under each proposal, who pays the doctor, the nurse, and the cost of the equipment and supplies?
13. Sanders wants government running coverage. The Soapbox video wants government out of the way. What evidence would show either one works?
14. What does each video's story about a suffering patient ask you to fear? What does each leave out?
15. The Soapbox video says the plan means nearly doubling taxes. Sanders never says how he would pay. What would you need to hear from him?
16. The Soapbox video praises Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. What would you need to know about those countries before agreeing?

17. Suppose the cost figure were half as big. Would that change your mind? Suppose the uninsured figure were half as big. Would that? If neither, what is your position resting on?
18. One video is from 2022 and uses 2021 numbers. The other is from 2025. Which figures would you check first? Why?
19. Neither video is a debate. One is a speech to a supportive audience. In the other, writers supplied the lines for both characters. How does that influence the way you evaluate each one?
20. What is the strongest argument on the side you disagree with?

Related Both Sides Pairings

Teachers looking to extend this discussion may want to pair it with these installments from the Both Sides of the Issue archive:

- [Medicare for All?](#) The original pairing this MiniGuide revisits
- [The Cost of Health Care](#)
- [Should We Have Single-Payer Healthcare?](#)
- [Universal Child Care](#)

Activities

The activities below may be used in any order. Each one requires students to engage with both videos. Worksheets begin on their own pages so they may be printed separately.

Activity 1: Venn Diagram Plus

Students often assume two opposing videos share no common ground at all. This pairing proves otherwise, and the overlap is the most important part of the lesson. Distribute the claim bank and the diagram after both videos have been viewed, and allow about fifteen minutes.

Students sort twelve claims into the diagram by letter, then answer the two questions in the Plus box. The answer key follows the worksheet and notes where more than one answer can be defended.

Name _____ Date _____
 Class _____ Period _____ Teacher _____

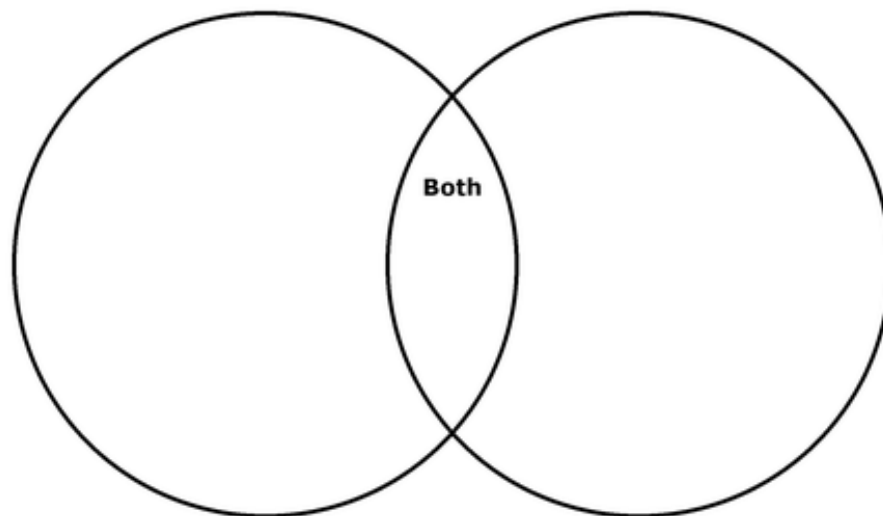
Venn Diagram Plus: Medicare for All Revisited

Write the letter of each claim in the part of the diagram where it belongs.

	Claim
A	Government limits how many new doctors are trained each year.
B	The current American health care system is broken.
C	People with cancer sometimes lose their life savings paying for care.
D	Most European countries run hybrid systems, not true single-payer.
E	Americans get too little in return for what the country already spends.
F	Insurance companies and hospitals profit in ways that hurt patients.
G	Medicare for All would cost about thirty-six trillion over ten years.
H	Doctors and nurses lose time to paperwork and arguments with insurers.
I	The United States already spends enormous public sums on health care.
J	Nothing is truly free; the cost of care gets paid one way or another.
K	More than sixty percent of Americans support Medicare for All.
L	The system can be improved without spending trillions of dollars.

Only the Sanders video

Only the Soapbox video



PLUS: Name one question neither video answers, and the evidence that would answer it.

Activity 1: Venn Diagram Plus—Answer Key

Only the Sanders video: C, F, H, K

Only the Common Sense Soapbox video: A, D, G, J, L

Both videos: B, E, I

Where more than one answer is acceptable

I (public money already spent). Only the Common Sense Soapbox video separates public spending from private spending. Sanders says the United States spends twice as much per person as any other nation without saying who pays which share. A student who places I in the right-hand circle is reading the videos precisely, and should be credited for saying why.

E (value for money). Sanders never uses the word “value.” He gets there by pairing the highest spending in the world with eighty-five million people uninsured or underinsured. The Common Sense Soapbox video says government rules “increase the cost of care without improving quality.” Accept either placement if the student can point to the line that supports it.

J (nothing is free). Some students will argue Sanders agrees, since he never claims care would cost nothing—only that patients would not face the bill. That is a strong reading. Accept it, and use it to open the difference between what a service costs and who pays for it.

Teacher Notes

Only three of the twelve claims land in the center, but one of them is the largest claim in the pairing: both sides say the system is broken. Ask the class directly—if two people agree the patient is sick, why do they prescribe opposite treatments? The answer is that they disagree about the cause. Sanders locates it in private profit. The Common Sense Soapbox video locates it in government limits on supply. Everything else in the pairing follows from that split.

If a class fills the center with only one item, send students back to the opening thirty seconds of each video. Both concessions come early, and both are easy to miss.

Activity 2: Trace the Claim

This pairing runs on four numbers, and not one of them is as simple as it sounds. In this activity, students take a figure back to the study or the agency that produced it and report what the original source actually says. Plan on one class period with device access, or assign it over two nights.

Assign each student or pair one claim, or divide the four among groups and report out. Point students to the description field under the Common Sense Soapbox video—the channel posts its source links there, which makes it a fair test of whether the receipts match the claim. The Sanders clip posts no sources, which is itself a finding worth recording.

Name _____ Date _____
Class _____ Period _____ Teacher _____

Trace the Claim: Four Numbers

Take your assigned claim back to the source that produced it. Fill in every row. If you cannot find an original source, write that down—it counts as a result.

#	The Claim	Video
1	Over sixty percent of the American people support Medicare for All.	Sanders
2	Eighty-five million are uninsured or underinsured.	Sanders
3	Medicare for All would cost an estimated thirty-six trillion over ten years.	Soapbox
4	Medicare and Medicaid cost taxpayers 1.37 trillion dollars in 2021.	Soapbox

My claim number:

The organization or study the number appears to come from:

What that source actually says, in its own words:

Who collected the data, and when:

Does the video's wording match the source? Explain any gap(s).

Activity 2: Trace the Claim— Teacher Notes

No answer key is possible in the usual sense, because what students find depends on which source they reach first. What follows is what a careful search turns up.

Claim 1—more than sixty percent support.

Polling from KFF and others has found majority support for a national Medicare-for-all plan, but the number moves sharply with wording. Support rises when people hear the plan described as guaranteeing coverage, and falls when they hear about higher taxes or longer waits; described with trade-offs on both sides, the public splits almost evenly. The honest finding is not that Sanders is wrong. It is that “sixty percent support it” is incomplete without the question that was asked. This sets up Activity 6.

Claim 2—eighty-five million uninsured or underinsured.

This traces to the Commonwealth Fund’s Biennial Health Insurance Survey, which found that roughly forty-three percent of adults ages nineteen to sixty-four were inadequately insured—about eighty-five million people. Two details usually surprise students. The survey covers working-age adults, not the whole population. And the total folds in people who held insurance on the day they were surveyed but had a gap in coverage sometime during the previous year. FactCheck.org has published an examination of how the figure has been used in speeches. This is the most productive of the four claims, because the number is real and the wording around it still shifts its meaning.

Claim 3—thirty-six trillion over ten years.

Students will not find a source that says exactly thirty-six trillion. The two studies everyone cites are the Mercatus Center analysis by Charles Blahous, which put added federal spending at 32.6 trillion over ten years, and an Urban Institute analysis that put it near thirty-four trillion. Different assumptions, different windows, different answers. The best part of this trail is what happened next: Senator Sanders’ staff found an error in the first version of the Mercatus study, and its author corrected the estimate downward by roughly three trillion dollars.

Push students one step past the argument the two videos are having. The Congressional Budget Office modeled five versions of a single-payer system in a February 2022 working paper. Federal spending rose in every one of the five, by 1.5 to 3.0 trillion dollars in the year 2030 alone. But total national health expenditures—what the country pays altogether, counting households, employers, and insurers along with government—ranged from a decrease of 743 billion dollars to an increase of 290 billion. Same agency, same year, same policy, five designs, and the total lands on both sides of zero.

That is not a trick or a scandal. It's what happens when the answer depends on choices the headline never mentions: what doctors and hospitals get paid, how much patients pay at the counter, and whether long-term care is covered. It also

explains how two people can each cite a real study and reach opposite conclusions—one is measuring the federal budget, the other is measuring what the country spends. Ask students which of those two numbers matters more to a family, and which matters more to Congress. There is no single right answer, and noticing that the question has two halves is the whole lesson.

Claim 4—1.37 trillion in 2021.

Send students to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services National Health Expenditure data, which is the primary source. The figure they compute will depend on whether they count only the federal share of Medicaid or the state share as well. The video's number is in the right neighborhood; whether it is exactly right turns on a definition the video never states. Ask students how a viewer watching at normal speed could have caught that.

The payoff question

Close by asking: which claim was hardest to trace, and why? Students usually report that the easiest number to check was the one with a source link attached—and that citing a source does not make a claim correct. It only makes it checkable.

One last instruction worth giving before students start: every figure in this pairing was published years ago, and newer work exists on all four. Tell students that finding a more recent estimate counts as a success, not as a failure to locate the original. Ask them to record the date beside every number they write down.

Activity 3: Cost-Benefit Analysis

Each video promises lower costs, and each is describing a different cost. This worksheet forces students to put both proposals through the same frame: what is gained, what is given up, who pays, and what nobody yet knows.

Work in pairs, then compare across the room. Require at least one item in every box. A pair that leaves the “What is given up” column empty for the proposal it favors has not finished the assignment—every policy costs somebody something.

Name _____ Date _____

Class _____ Period _____ Teacher _____

Cost-Benefit Analysis: Two Ways to Fix Health Care

Fill in each box using evidence from the videos. Every box needs at least one entry.

	Proposal A: a single taxpayer-funded plan (Sanders)	Proposal B: fewer government limits on supply (Common Sense Soapbox)
What is gained		
What is given up		
Who pays		
Who gains most		
What nobody knows yet		

Which proposal do the videos give you more evidence about? Is that the same as which one is better?

Activity 4: Letter to a Legislator

Health care is argued in two places at once, and students rarely know it. Medicare for All is a bill in Congress. Certificate of need laws—the rules the Common Sense Soapbox video says block new hospitals—are written in state capitals, and roughly thirty-five states still have them. Each student picks the arena that fits his or her position and writes to the officeholder who can actually act.

Make clear before students begin that the letter is evaluated on how well it engages the strongest opposing argument, not on which position it takes. “Leave the system as it is” is a permitted position but must be argued for as carefully as any other.

Letter Requirements

- Open with one sentence naming the change you want and stating your position on it.
- Cite at least one specific figure or example from each video, and name where it came from.
- Devote one full paragraph to the strongest argument against your position, stated in the terms its own supporters would use rather than in terms they would reject.
- Explain why you still hold your position after weighing that argument.
- Close by naming one specific action you want the officeholder to take.
- Keep the letter to a single page, and hold a respectful tone throughout. An officeholder stops reading an insulting letter.

Before Students Write

Have the class look up two things: who represents the school district in Congress, and whether the state has a certificate of need law on the books. The second search takes about five minutes and often surprises students, because it turns a national argument into a local one.

Extension

Have each student trade letters with a classmate who chose the opposite position, then write a one-paragraph reply that begins by naming the single strongest point in the letter received.

Activity 5: Exit Ticket Reflection

Use this at the close of the lesson. Collect the tickets and sort them by position before the next class, so students can see how the room actually divides rather than how they assumed it would. The second prompt matters most. It asks a student to hold on to a fact that cuts against him or her.

Distribute the ticket on the following page and allow five to seven minutes.

Name _____ Date _____
Class _____ Period _____ Teacher _____

Exit Ticket: Medicare for All Revisited

1. In one sentence, what do the two videos actually disagree about?

2. Name one fact from the video you agree with less that you still cannot dismiss.

3. Where do you stand right now? Circle one, then give your reason in one sentence.

A single taxpayer-funded plan
Something else

Fewer government limits on supply
Not sure yet

4. What's the one thing you would need to find out before you could be more certain?

Activity 6: Two Prompts, Two Answers

This pairing is the ideal place to teach students how wording steers an answer, because the wording effect is documented in the topic itself. Polling on Medicare for All swings sharply depending on how the question is asked—the same policy, the same respondents, very different results. An AI assistant inherits that same sensitivity, and this activity makes it visible in about half a class period.

The point is not that the machine is dishonest. Both answers it gives may be defensible. The point is that a fluent, confident answer is not a neutral referee, and that the person typing the prompt has already put a thumb on the scale before the first word comes back.

Two ways to run this

Whole class. The teacher projects one device and submits both prompts while the class records what comes back on the worksheet. Allow about twenty-five minutes, including the rewrite round.

Small groups. Groups of three work on school devices; half the groups submit Prompt A first, half submit Prompt B first, so order effects do not go unnoticed. Allow one class period.

Use whichever AI assistant your school permits. No particular product is required, and different assistants producing different answers is a useful result rather than a problem. If student accounts are restricted in your district, run the projected version—the lesson works the same way.

Round 1—submit these two prompts exactly as written, in separate conversations

Prompt A: Explain why Medicare for All is a good idea for the United States.

Prompt B: Explain why Medicare for All is a bad idea for the United States.

Starting a fresh conversation for each prompt matters. An assistant that has already answered Prompt A will remember it, and the second answer will bend toward the first. You can also use chat sessions that are outside of your AI assistant's normal memory to prevent "bleed through."

Round 2—write a better prompt

Having seen what one-sided wording produces, each student writes a prompt designed to get a genuinely two-sided answer, submits it, and records whether it worked. A prompt that names the disagreement, asks for evidence on both sides, and asks what is uncertain tends to do better than one that simply says "be balanced."

Name _____ Date _____
Class _____ Period _____ Teacher _____

Two Prompts, Two Answers

Record what each answer contained. You are grading the response, not the topic.

What to look for	Answer to Prompt A	Answer to Prompt B
Main claim, in your words		
Numbers given		
Sources named		
Did it mention the other side?		
Did it say anything was uncertain?		

Score each answer: 1 = not at all, 4 = very well.

	A	B
Balance — both positions stated fairly		
Evidence — specific figures rather than general claims		
Sourcing — says where the figures came from		
Uncertainty — admits what is disputed or unknown		
Currency — the information is recent enough to trust		

My rewritten prompt:

Did it produce a more balanced answer? What specifically changed?

Activity 6: Two Prompts, Two Answers—Teacher Notes

The activity and these notes are written for a teacher who has never used one of these tools. No preparation is needed beyond opening the assistant your school allows and typing the prompt.

No answer key is possible. These tools produce different text every time, even from the same prompt on the same day, and two assistants will not agree with each other. That is why the worksheet scores the response rather than checking it against a key. Students are evaluating quality, not hunting for a right answer.

What usually happens

Both answers tend to arrive well organized and confident, which is the first thing worth pointing out—confidence is a feature of the writing, not evidence about the world. Most assistants will argue whichever side the prompt asks for and will supply real-sounding figures for it. Many will add a closing paragraph acknowledging the other view. Ask students whether that paragraph does real work or simply softens the ending.

Numbers are where the trouble lives. An assistant may cite a cost estimate without saying which study produced it, or attach a figure to the wrong organization. Any number the class cannot trace belongs on the board next to the four claims from Activity 2.

When the class gets a genuinely two-sided answer

This happens, and it is a good outcome rather than a failed activity. Say so. Then push one step further: ask whether the two sides were given equal space, whether both got specific evidence or only one did, and whether the answer said which points are actually disputed among people who study the question. A balanced-sounding answer can still be lopsided underneath.

The connection back to the videos

Close the activity by returning to the polling. Support for Medicare for All rises when people hear it described as guaranteeing coverage and falls when they hear about higher taxes or longer waits—the same policy, worded two ways, two different publics. Students have just done to a machine what pollsters have long done to people. The skill they are practicing is not really about AI. It is about noticing that a question is never neutral, including the ones they ask themselves.