

## Discussion Questions for 17.317, U.S. Social Policy

### **Part I: American Exceptionalism and a Case: Why No National Health Insurance in the United States?**

- This section of the course uses a case study of national health insurance in the U.S. as a way to introduce the policymaking process in the United States and some of the major explanations for policy outcomes

### **U.S. Health Policy**

- What are some of the main explanations for the lack of universal health insurance in the US? For the failure of the Clinton health care reform effort of 1993-1994?
- What are “cultural” explanations? What are “interest” explanations? What are “institutional” explanations? What kind of evidence would proponents of one or the other put forth?
- How would you describe the American political culture? What kind of evidence do we have about what the American political culture is? What are the implications for policymaking? What are the shortcomings of cultural arguments as an explanation for policy outcomes – how well do cultural arguments explain cross-national variation? Temporal variation?
- Similarly, how would you describe the institutional set up of American government, and what are its implications for policymaking? What are the advantages and disadvantages of institutional arguments?
- What are “interest” explanations? What interests are we talking about, and why are they influential? What advantages does this kind of argument have over cultural arguments? Where does this argument fall down?
- When have the major pushes for national health insurance taken place in the U.S.? How would each of the theories outlined above explain why NHI failed to achieve passage each time?
- What is the state of public opinion around health care? How has it changed, or not, over time? If you were a policymaker, what message would you take from the survey results listed in the Blendon and Benson article?
- If many Americans say they want universal health insurance (UHI) – as has often been the case in surveys – what does the fact that UHI has repeatedly failed in the US say about the place of public opinion in policymaking? Or about the characteristics of public opinion – are those surveys meaningful?