

Sacrificing the Right to Life

Public Policy Memo

Do we really have the right to life? Often, our immediate answer is, “Of course!”, but if we look at the U.S. Constitution, it isn’t explicitly stated. This right is described in the Declaration of Independence as an unalienable right, and the Fourteenth Amendment does specify that states cannot deprive anyone of life without due process. If the right to life is self-evident as the founder’s say, then why are the necessities that make life possible anything but guaranteed to us? If we remove what is necessary to exercise a right, what use is that right? If all methods for turning in a ballot are eliminated, what use is our right to vote? To live, we need access to clean air, clean water, nutritious food, sufficient shelter, healthy relationships, effective healthcare, and, in modern life, transportation, yet none of these are guaranteed. These necessities, which boil down to healthy environments and adequate social structures, are things we’ve already determined better solutions for. Unfortunately, these are things that have been sacrificed in the name of profit to private industries.

When it comes to our environment, oil spills and train derailments are just the tip of the iceberg. There’s no lack of major incidents which cause long lasting environmental damage, yet the primary factors have gone largely unmitigated. Oil companies that buried their own research and funded massive misinformation campaigns to save their profit margins are still in business. Automotive industries persistently lobby governments and fund misinformation to prevent transitions to public transit. These lobbyists push electric vehicles that are only marginally better over the course of ten years than their gas powered counterparts, but more profitable for them than efficient transit options. Food industries put animals in horrid conditions and distribute mass antibiotics. They use pesticides that run into our water supply so that they can produce cash crops. Similarly, coal mining and fracking companies frequently pollute local water supplies and then deny and ignore residents’ concerns about their subsequent health issues while they lobby for looser regulations to boost their record earnings. Our air, our water, our land, and our food are polluted for corporate profit at the expense of our health.

It's not just the health of our natural environment that has been sacrificed for monetary gain. The efficacy of our social structures has also been sacrificed. Homeowner Associations and real estate businesses lobby and push misinformation to prevent the construction of space-efficient, affordable housing options. Corporate landlords take any opportunity to raise rates for the benefit of their investors at the expense of tenants. They treat housing as an investment to make a profit on rather than the need that it is for everyone. This artificially boosts the price of housing by limiting availability and stealing opportunity and finance from future generations. Social media companies focus on how to get users to spend more time on their sites for ad revenue, despite knowing that the comparisons and self-reinforcing cycles they produce are harmful to mental health. Urban sprawl and lack of alternative transit methods, the design of which caters to automotive and housing industries, keeps friends and loved ones further separated while communication networks have been privatized as well. Socialization, whether in person or digitally, has been put behind a paywall. U.S. healthcare costs nearly double that of peer nations yet falls to last in efficacy. When you put health in the hands of profit motive, every accident is a potential bankruptcy, making insurance necessary and creating another paywall. Our access to housing, socialization, and healthcare has been sacrificed for private profit.

Until access to our needs is no longer dependent upon private interests, we will never have the right to life. Our lives are not an asset to be sold out from under us. The monetization of our needs must be replaced. The economic freedom of a few cannot be allowed to trump the lives of many. We must look past the facades of generosity that profit focused industries put on to see just how much of paradise has been paved over and insist that our right to life cannot be overruled.

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