The movement for a national health system in the United States has a long history. In the mid-century, Presidents Harry Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower advocated for a government-owned and run public health system that would care for the elderly. In the summer of 1965, President Lyndon Baines Johnson signed what we now know as Medicare into existence.

This exploratory paper will examine several preliminary research questions. For instance, why, at the height of American global power, and during an unprecedented expansion of the American federal state, was it that this health care concept took so long to implement? Why, when the United Kingdom had implemented the National Health Service shortly after the Second World War, had the United States failed to do so? What role did the specter of the Soviet Union play in the success of Medicare’s implementation, and in what ways did the idea of Soviet Socialism impede such progress? What corporate forces aligned against the campaign for a health system for American elders? And upon examination, what can the business community’s past opposition to national health tell us both about the nature of that community, and the future of public health in the United States?