



[http://tpmcafe.talkingpointsmemo.com/2009/09/02/what if rush limbaughs house was on fire/](http://tpmcafe.talkingpointsmemo.com/2009/09/02/what_if_rush_limbaugh_s_house_was_on_fire/)

What If Rush Limbaugh's House Was on Fire?



By [Peter Dreier](#) - September 2, 2009, 2:10AM

I wonder what Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, Senator Jim DeMint, or the right-wing "tea party" crowd would say if they lived north of Los Angeles and their homes were threatened by wildfires.

I live in Pasadena, California where, only a few miles from my house, firefighters are currently battling the intense wildfires. These courageous government employees are risking their lives - two have already died - to save others' lives and properties. Since it began a week ago, the fire has swept through 121,000 acres - an area almost the size of Chicago. Residents of thousands of homes have been evacuated and many more are on alert. By any standard, the 3,600 fire fighters have done an outstanding job under extremely harsh conditions. Fire officials, meteorologists and others from many municipal and county governments, as well as the state and federal governments -- including the National Weather Service and the U.S. Forest Service - have seamlessly coordinated their efforts.

This catastrophe, and the heroic efforts of these public servants, is taking place while the country is debating whether government should play a larger role in health care. For weeks, conservatives - in Congress and in dozens of town hall meetings - have been attacking President Obama's health care plan by demonizing government in general. They claim that government is inherently inefficient compared with private business. They also argue that there is no "right" to health care. People who want health insurance should pay for it themselves. If they can't afford it - tough luck. Keep government out of our lives.

But I doubt that any of the conservative Congressmembers, the right-wing talk show hosts, or the angry tea-party activists who've been disrupting town meetings believe that fire-fighting is something that we should leave to the private sector. Homeowners

purchase insurance from private companies in case their homes get destroyed by a natural disaster. But when it comes to protecting their homes from fires, the real insurance is the local Fire Department.

Fighting fires is a responsibility of government. It should not be done for profit or provided only to those who can afford to pay for it on a fee-for-service basis. We pay taxes so that government can employ firefighters, meteorologists, and others to protect people from harm, regardless of income, because it is in the public interest to do so.

President Obama's health insurance plan doesn't call for doctors, nurses, and other health professionals to become government employees. Hospitals and clinics, and the health professionals who work there, will remain private. What Obama has proposed is that government provide health insurance for people who can't afford, or don't want, private health insurance - essentially, an expansion of Medicare. That, too, is an appropriate role for government. But only if you believe that having affordable health insurance should be available to everyone, regardless of income.

The Limbaugh lunatics and their political allies are on a crusade to demonize government as evil, inefficient, and an abuser of liberty. Let them try to sell that ideology to the thousands of government employees who are fighting the fires north of my home - and to the families whose homes and lives are being saved by these courageous public servants.