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## Romneycare still sickening to some

By Christine McConville

So-called Romneycare is still former Gov. [Mitt Romney](#)'s Achilles' heel in his GOP presidential primary race, but it may not keep him from reaching his White House dreams, political experts said.

“Yes, it does hurt him,” Greater Boston Tea Party President Christen Varley said about Romney's insurance-for-all law. “He was the chief executive of a state that instituted the mandatory purchase of health insurance.”

But, she added, with Republican primaries still months away, there's a good chance that his competitors' own political pasts will make people forget about the Bay State's controversial first-in-the-nation universal health-care law, which was the template for President Obama's even more controversial national mandate.

“The question is, is this sin of his greater than the sins of the others?” Varley asked.

On the campaign trail, Romney strives to differentiate between Romneycare and Obamacare, pointing out that the Massachusetts law supports state rights, while the federal law strips states of cherished powers. He even says he'll repeal Obama's plan if elected.

It's a tough position to maintain, Democratic strategist Mary Anne Marsh said.

“If he is the nominee, this will make it hard for him to go after Obama in the general election,” she said. “He is going to have to do it, and he will try, all day long, but it will be very hard to draw a big red line between him and Barack Obama.”

Cato Institute health policy analyst Michael Cannon agreed.

“He can't thread the needle. He can't have it both ways,” Cannon said. “If he says, ‘I'm sorry, it was a mistake,’ he's a flip-flopper.”

In Massachusetts, most health policy experts say the law is a success, because 98 percent of Bay Staters have health insurance. But that expanded access has come at a great cost. Health-care costs have risen more dramatically than expected, driving up premiums and putting a strain on the state budget.

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