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## Massachusetts Health Care Reform Not as Successful as Lawmakers Claim, Free Market Analyst Says

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By Marie Magleby

**(CNSNews.com)** - Lawmakers are painting a rose-colored picture of Massachusetts' 2006 health care reform, according to Michael Tanner, senior fellow at the Cato Institute and author of the book, "Health Competition: What's Holding Back Health Care and How to Free It."

Although Massachusetts' health care system is often cited as a model for national reform, Tanner said the data show that lawmakers and some media are skewing the facts to downplay the reality of health care in the Bay State.

"It does not look like the Massachusetts plan has actually been successful at accomplishing what it set out to accomplish according to its proponents, if you want to judge it by their criteria," Tanner said at a panel discussion on Monday at the U.S. Capitol.

"I think that that's particularly relevant, since Massachusetts is so frequently cited by both folks on the left and on the right as a model for how health care reform nationally should go," he said.

Congressional lawmakers, he added, should be wary of using the Massachusetts model if they want to avoid some of the same mistakes.

"You look to what they're talking about here in Washington and then you look back to Massachusetts and you see some parallels," said Tanner. "So the question then is, 'What have we learned in those three years in Massachusetts?'"

When Massachusetts adopted a new health care plan three years ago, then-Gov. Mitt Romney, a Republican, claimed the plan would provide universal health care and lower insurance premiums, neither of which have been realized, according to Tanner.

"Massachusetts's biggest mistake was they made universal coverage the lodestone of their reform," he said.

Tanner further explained that while the rate of uninsured citizens in Massachusetts has decreased, the official statistic of 2.6 percent may be inaccurate.

"There's reasons to doubt those statistics," he said. "They are in large part based on a telephone survey of people in the state, and there's a lot of reasons to be skeptical of telephone surveys, particularly when it comes to insurance."

According to Tanner, a U.S. Census Bureau survey conducted in 2006 found that 5.4 percent of the population

was still uninsured. State income-tax returns also suggest that the figure is more than five percent.

Similarly, Romney said the reform would make health care affordable for every Massachusetts citizen. According to Tanner, however, the situation has not turned out that way.

“The reality is that in 2007, the first year after the plan went into place, insurance premiums rose by 7.4 percent. It went up by about 12 percent in 2008, and they’re expected to rise nine percent this year,” he said. “Overall, that’s an average of 10 to 12 percent increases in the insurance premiums in Massachusetts.”

“That’s compared to a 6 to 7 percent increase nationally over the same period,” he said.

Although Massachusetts health care reform has fallen short of these goals, its cost to taxpayers has increased, according to Tanner.

“Despite the fact that taxes increased and tax increases there are contemplated for the future, they still find the plan under-funded going forward,” he said. “That is an enormous burden on the taxpayers of Massachusetts.”

“That might, or might not, be forgivable if it had accomplished any of its original goals,” he said. “But it does not look like the Massachusetts plan has actually been successful at accomplishing what it set out to accomplish.”

Tanner said it is important to look more closely at health care reform in Massachusetts to address the issue on the national level.

“We started with a program that increased subsidies and limited choice. That led to growing costs, [and] that led to tax on expenditures, [and] that led to waiting times – the whole range that led right down the road to national health care,” he said.

Three years ago, Tanner wrote that the Massachusetts reform would result “in a slow but steady spiral downward toward a government-run health care system,” he said. “Three years in, I think that that is proving true and we are in the middle of that spiral downward toward a government-run health care plan this past week.”

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