



Romneycare a big bust

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As governor, **Mitt Romney** accomplished a feat that most Republicans would have thought impossible. With the single stroke of a pen he convinced the liberal population of Massachusetts that they, too, hate government-run health care.

As a health care plan, Romneycare is an unmitigated fiasco. It has caused costs to skyrocket, insurance premiums to soar and nonprofit providers like Blue Cross to suffer hundreds of millions of dollars in losses.

But as a political policy, Romneycare is nearly unparalleled in Republican history. It has destroyed one front-runner's presidential hopes (Romney's) and helped undermine an entire presidency. For, as Barack Obama's supporters keep reminding us, Romneycare was the precursor to Obamacare.

And what has Obamacare accomplished? It knocked Nancy Pelosi out of the speaker's chair and helped drive the president's approval rating to new lows. Dick Cheney couldn't have come up with a sneakier scheme to destroy Democrats.

Think about how powerful Romneycare has been. In 2008 — when Obama was running for president and Ted Kennedy was towering over the Senate — nearly 70 percent of Massachusetts voters supported the plan. A mere 22 percent of right-wing holdouts opposed it.

After all, this is Massachusetts, where “uni- versal health care” is a political mantra, like “collective bargaining rights” or “indicted House member.”

But after five years of actually experiencing this new universe, even the Kennedy Democrats have had enough. A new Suffolk University poll showed that nearly half of Massachusetts voters say the law isn't helping, while just 38 percent say it is. As Michael Cannon at the Cato Institute pointed out, Romneycare is almost as unpopular here as Obama- care is across America.

That's not supposed to happen.

Romneycare has also blown a hole in Romney's reputation as a “numbers” guy, a savvy business guru who, like him or not, knows how to handle your money.

Uh, anyone checked these Romneycare numbers lately?

Taxpayers now spend \$2.5 billion more on our state's health care budget. The direct cost of Romneycare has gone from less than \$100 million a year to at least \$400 million — and even that number is suspect. But we do know we've spent more than \$35 million in a single year on health services for **illegal immigrants**, and tens of millions more on illegal, unallowable or outright bogus claims.

If you want to know why Romneycare's costs keep rising, check out this simple statistic from the Patrick administration: In 2006, 85 percent of the insured in Massachusetts got their coverage through private group coverage at work. Today that's down to 79 percent.

Meanwhile the percentage on the MassHealth dole has doubled, and more than 150,000 people are now subsidized through Commonwealth Care.

Romneycare supporters like Brandeis University health policy professor Stuart Altman brag that “the basic reason for the reform was to extend coverage, and on this, we have done amazingly well.” But that's only if you use the phrase “extend coverage” to mean “the government forced you to buy your own insurance.”

Romneycare hasn't made that insurance more affordable — just the opposite. Many people have seen their premiums double in the past five years. Supporters also never mention that when Romneycare was signed, Massachusetts already had one of the nation's lowest rates of uninsured.

Billions of dollars spent to accomplish so very little — that's Romneycare's legacy, and a glimpse of Obamacare's future.

Michael Graham hosts a talk show on 96.9 **WTKK**.

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