

Romney stands by Mass. health care plan in U-M speech

BY TODD SPANGLER

DETROIT FREE PRESS WASHINGTON STAFF

May 13, 2011|

Mitt Romney has heard the critics who say that he should disavow the health care system he signed into law in Massachusetts five years ago, the ones who carp that it was the model for the system enacted nationally by President Barack Obama and a formerly Democratic-controlled Congress.

He won't do it.

On Thursday, in a major policy speech at the [University](#) of Michigan Cardiovascular Center in Ann Arbor, Romney -- who grew up in Bloomfield Hills and is the son of former Michigan Gov. George Romney -- said he remains proud of the law he signed as then-governor of Massachusetts in 2006. To call it a mistake now, he said, "wouldn't be honest."

"I, in fact, did what I thought was right for the people of my state," Romney said.

But that's a long way from an endorsement of the Democratic plan, approved by Congress in early 2010. Although some of the provisions mirror those in the Massachusetts law, Romney called for the

repeal and replacement of the president's plan.

He drew distinctions between the two and pointed out that imposing rules on health care coverage across the nation strangles the innovations that states may come up with.

"Health care in Massachusetts may be different than in Montana or Mississippi," he said.

"Our plan was a state solution to a state problem," he added. "His is a power grab by the federal government."

As for his own plan for the nation, Romney said it hasn't changed since when he made an unsuccessful run for the Republican nomination for president three years ago.

He would, he said, issue an executive order on his first day in the White House to let states opt out of the system. Then he would begin implementing a system that provides states a block grant for Medicaid

recipients, turning it over to them to try ways of reducing costs.

He also would provide individual purchasers of insurance the same tax break received by people who have insurance through their employers. Romney said he would cap medical liability and open competition for insurers across state lines.

Addressing health care reform and the Massachusetts experiment was important for Romney, though many of his toughest critics still said that unless he backed away from it, he was doomed as a candidate.

An editorial in Thursday's Wall Street Journal opined that Romney's "failure to

explain his own role or admit any errors suggest serious flaws both in his candidacy and as a potential president."

Democrats chided him for Thursday's speech. U.S. Rep. John Dingell, a Dearborn Democrat who helped write the health care reform legislation, said, "The man whose state's health care plan was a model for the country is now saying what was good for the goose is not good for the gander."

Michael Cannon, director of health policy studies at the Cato Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank, said: "Mitt Romney is dragging down the (health care) repeal effort. He wants to say Romneycare is a good idea but Obamacare is a bad idea, and that just doesn't work."

Most polls continue to show Romney leading most of the would-be Republican

field. Romney, at this point, remains one of only a handful of Republicans who have announced an exploratory committee to run.

Contact TODD SPANGLER: 202-906-8203 or tspangl@freepress.com