

Sit Down, Mitt, You're Not Helping (Guest Opinion)



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Mitt Romney's reversals on [abortion](#), [gay marriage](#), [gun control](#), [campaign finance](#) and [immigration](#) leave one with the impression that when Mitt Romney is with you, he's with you. At least until he leaves the room.

Romney's latest trick is to make his stunning reversal on government-run health care look like a non-reversal. It's not working.

Republican primary voters abhor President Barack Obama's new health care law, as do [independents](#), largely because it includes an "individual mandate" requiring nearly all Americans to purchase health insurance. Romney calls Obamacare an "economic nightmare" that he would repeal as president.

Yet as governor of Massachusetts, Romney in 2006 signed a health care law that included the nation's first individual mandate, plus a raft of new government spending and regulations. To say it served as a blueprint for Obamacare would be an understatement. NPR [reports](#) that Obamacare "was based, almost line for line, on the Massachusetts model."

Romney tried once again last week to explain why Obamacare is bad but Romneycare is good. He failed again, this time spectacularly. Conservative columnist Jonah Goldberg [dubbed](#) the [speech](#) a "political disaster."

Romney's first attempt to distinguish between the two laws went like this. He admitted to some similarities, but said that in our federalist system states can do things that the national government cannot. True enough. But is Romney really telling people who care about freedom that the federal government should not take away their liberties, but it's okay when state governments do it?

Next, Romney claimed, "Our plan was a state solution to a state problem." In fact, it was neither.

The problem of uninsured people showing up in emergency rooms unable to pay occurs in every state. By Romney's logic, shouldn't they all enact an individual mandate? (In the past, Romney said [yes](#).) And since it's a federal law that requires emergency rooms to care for those free-riders, doesn't that suggest the need for a national solution?

If anything, Romneycare may be making the free-rider problem worse. The Wall Street Journal [reports](#) that uncompensated care and misuse of emergency rooms are on the rise in Massachusetts. The number of people who wait until they are sick to buy health insurance then stop paying the premiums once they get treated, the Boston Globe reports, has [quadrupled](#) under Romneycare.

Nor is Romneycare a one-state experiment. The federal government is covering half the cost of the law's Medicaid expansion and letting Massachusetts keep billions of Medicaid dollars that Washington should have revoked. We are all paying for Romneycare.

Romney's next ploy was to claim that unlike Obamacare, his plan "didn't raise taxes." Really?

If employers don't provide health benefits, Romneycare fines them \$295 per employee. That's a tax. The federal government's contribution to the state effort is adding to the national debt. That's a tax on future generations. Most important, under Romney's individual mandate, health insurance premiums are the functional equivalent of a tax: people who fail to make the mandatory premium payments face fines and imprisonment.

Finally, Romney [said](#) that unlike Obamacare, "There's no government insurance here." Yet both laws dramatically expand Medicaid, a government-run health insurance program.

Moreover, both make private health insurance compulsory, dictate its content and price, and heavily subsidize it. As columnist Michael Kinsley [asks](#), "If the government requires insurers to accept all customers and charge all the same price, regulates all aspects of their marketing to make sure they aren't discriminating, and then redistributes the profits to make sure that no company gets penalized unfairly, in what sense is the industry still 'private'?"

Romney once [said](#), "I would be happy to take credit" for Obamacare. As he should: Romney bears as much responsibility for Obamacare as any Democrat. Now he wants to repeal it. This absurd attempt to have it both ways is turning Romney into a [laughing stock](#). The longer he drags it out, the more oxygen he will suck out of the effort to repeal Obamacare.

If Mitt sincerely wants to rid the nation of Obamacare, there are things a man in his compromised position can do.

First, while raising money for state-level candidates, he can encourage states not to create any type of health insurance exchange -- neither the Massachusetts nor the Utah variety -- lest those new government bureaucracies entrench Obamacare.

Second, he can run for governor of Massachusetts again on a pledge to repeal Romneycare. That might prove his sincerity. And he's just the man to do it.

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