

# POLITICO

## Romney's law, ACA very similar

By: Sarah Kliff

May 12, 2011 01:57 PM EDT

It's a rare area of agreement in the contentious health reform debate: the Massachusetts health reforms passed by Mitt Romney in 2006 and the federal law passed last year are really, really similar.

In a span of just a few hours and in the lead up to Romney's health speech, the point has been made by everyone from The Wall Street Journal editorial page and Cato Institute to the Center for American Progress.

"As everyone knows, the health reform Mr. Romney passed in 2006 as Massachusetts governor was the prototype for President Obama's version and gave national health care a huge political boost," The Wall Street Journal wrote in a scathing Thursday morning editorial, contending that if Romney did not apologize for his leadership on Massachusetts's health reform, "he might as well try to knock off Joe Biden and get on the Obama ticket."

"The similarities between what he championed in Massachusetts and what the president has championed are about 100 percent," Center for American Progress's Neera Tanden, who heads up the pro-reform group Protect Your Care, said on MSNBC Thursday morning.

"It doesn't even seem fair to call them similarities, it seems like they're identicalities," says Michael Cannon, health policy director with the Cato Institute.

Presidential contender Mitt Romney will use Thursday's speech in Michigan to lay out a new platform on health reform, one that centers on widespread Republican health policy ideas like increasing the availability of Health Savings Accounts and reforming medical liability.

Those proposals have gotten some attention. Former Sen. Jim Talent, now a fellow at the Heritage Institute, praised Romney's proposals writing in the National Review Online Thursday that Romney's new plan "would create no new federal agencies, does not raise taxes and would aim to reduce federal spending."

But even Cannon dismissed Romney's platform as "Republican boilerplate," recycling ideas well accepted in Republican circles for years now.

And, on the balance, what's received more attention than Romney's plan for the future is his work in the past: his role as Massachusetts governor in passing a sweeping health reform law that, in many ways, laid the foundation for the federal overhaul Congress passed last year.

In three main ways, the two health overhauls are remarkably similar. Both rely on a three-legged stool of universal coverage, mandated purchase of insurance and subsidies to those who cannot afford the insurance premiums.

Passed in 2006, Massachusetts was the first state in the nation to mandate the purchase of health insurance. Those who do not carry insurance are assessed a tax penalty as high

as \$1,116. When passed at the state level, the mandate received much less attention than it has in the federal reform, with more than half the states challenging the provision's constitutionality. All told, most Massachusetts citizens comply with the mandate: just about 1 percent of citizens paid the penalty in 2009, the most recent year for which data is available.

That mandated purchase of insurance comes along with tax subsidies for individuals who earn up to 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Line, to make insurance affordable.

Another key component of the Massachusetts health reform was the Commonwealth Connector, a new, online marketplace where individuals could use their tax subsidies to purchase health insurance plans in the individual and small-group markets.

About 401,000 Massachusetts residents have become insured since the 2006 reforms came online, translating into a decrease of uninsured, working-age adults from 13 percent to 4 percent, according to an Urban Institute study.

The federal health reform law expands those ideas to a national level. The numbers are slightly different — a \$795 fee eventually that will eventually be assessed on those who do not carry insurance and tax subsidies for those up to 400 percent of the federal poverty line — but the overall structure is similar.

"The fundamentals are the same," says Michael Miller, policy director for the Boston-based Community Catalyst, which did work on both the Massachusetts and federal reforms. "The Medicaid expansion, exchanges and subsidies for people who can't get affordable insurance through the workplace, all of those structures are in both."

Under the federal health reform law, every state will also have a new insurance marketplace, called a health exchange. How much those ultimately resemble the Massachusetts Connector remains to be seen. While some states are interested in emulating Massachusetts's "selective purchaser" model, where the government can decide which health plans qualify to sell on the exchange, others are looking at a more laissez-faire approach, which would let all plans compete.

As the federal health reform law comes online, the state officials who worked on the Massachusetts health reform project have come into hot demand. Jon Kingsdale, former executive director of the Massachusetts Connector, now has a booming exchange consulting business and has done work with Wisconsin and California. Melissa Boudreault, who previously ran the Commonwealth Care Plan, now heads up Dell's State Health Services operation.

Those who worked on the Massachusetts health reform experience describe Romney as an active force — and don't necessarily see him walking away from that experience.

"I've not heard him walk away from his involvement in terms of what happened," Thomas Glynn, who served as Chief Operating Officer at Partners HealthCare in Boston during the run up to the passage of Massachusetts's health reform law, said at a recent Center for America Progress event. "The impression has been given that he pretends he wasn't there. I don't think that's a fair characterization."

*This article first appeared on [POLITICO Pro](#) at 1:09 p.m. on May 12, 2011.*

© 2011 Capitol News Company, LLC

