



The governor's addiction: Chris Christie should go cold turkey on campaigning

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May 2, 2017

Hardly a day goes by that I don't receive a press release about how the governor has met with yet another group of recovering addicts.

I admire private citizens who do this sort of thing with their own resources.

But when politicians do it, I suspect they're up to something.

What Christie's up to is continuing the endless campaign that began when he took office more than seven years ago.

But if the governor ever returns to the task of governing, he might notice that his efforts on the drug-policy front run directly counter to the efforts of conservative Republicans to repeal the mandates included in Obamacare.

While the national Republicans have been busy trying to repeal mandates, Christie has been busy coming up with ways to inflict new mandates on the taxpayers and ratepayers of New Jersey.

Those moves included a bill that passed almost unanimously in January requiring health insurers to cover up to 180 days of treatment per year for recovering addicts.

Then there is that effort he's making to force Horizon Blue Cross and Blue Shield of New Jersey to spend a good chunk of its surplus on providing addiction services.

These moves haven't gotten much attention from conservatives on the national scene, so I figured I'd run them by Michael Cannon.

Cannon is at the free-market Cato Institute in Washington. His critique of the individual mandate to purchase health insurance was central to that case in which the U.S. Supreme Court came within one vote of throwing out that mandate, which is the cornerstone of Obamacare.

"The whole world is going in one direction and Christie in the other," said Cannon after I filled him in on our governor's recent moves. "He's going against the party's entire anti-Obamacare wing,"

That wing is within a couple of votes of a majority in the House of Representatives. Republicans could pass a compromise bill this week pushed by U.S. Rep. Tom MacArthur of New Jersey's 3rd District that would end the individual mandate and a slew of other mandates as well.

Governor Christie seems to be of the opinion that every problem can be solved by appointing a lawyer to handle it; so far that has been a disaster, yet he now wants to extend that approach to the drug war

The conservative idea is that people should be able to purchase health insurance a la carte, choosing just the benefits they desire.

Christie has instead embraced adding more and more mandates. In addition to the drug-treatment bill, he also signed a bill yesterday mandating insurers cover expanded infertility treatments.

These mandates may be well-meaning, but they push up premiums and price consumers out of the market, said Cannon.

"It seems like the folks in New Jersey figure health insurance is not expensive enough already," he said.

But that's not the only way in which Christie is going against the conservative grain, said Cannon. There's also his top-down approach on the drug issue.

In last year's GOP presidential primary, most of the candidates took the approach that the states are the laboratories of democracy and can do as they desire. Christie stood out by stating that, if elected, he'd shut those laboratories down when it comes to pot.

Chris Christie's insistence on creating a nationwide system of drug courts gives him more in common with nanny-state Democrats and than states'-rights Republicans, as does his assertion that addiction is a disease

As a libertarian, Cannon opposes the War on Drugs that has been going on since the Nixon administration.

"The new approach is liberalization of marijuana at least and hopefully more drugs later," Cannon said. "But he won't even let go of marijuana criminalization."

Christie has largely fallen out of the national news, so Cannon had not heard of that plan to raid the Horizon surplus to fund drug treatment.

The idea of the government ordering a private company to fund a drug-rehab program sounded as nutty to him as it does to me.

"Why doesn't he raise taxes to do it?" he asked. "That's fairer than picking an unpopular industry and shaking them down."

He doesn't raise taxes because he purports to be a tax-cutter. But this is just a way of accomplishing the same goal - at the expense of rate-payers instead of taxpayers.

But where does a governor get the legal authority to tell a private, not-for-profit corporation how to spend its money? Cannon said he's never heard of such a maneuver in any other state.

Perhaps that's because insurance companies by their very nature need healthy surpluses to hedge against future losses.

Horizon certainly does, at least according to one of the top ratings agencies on Wall Street. Standard and Poor's put out a release stating that the current surplus represents a reasonable cushion against calamitous events. In the event of some sort of raid on the surplus, "we could lower our ratings in the next 12-24 months," the agency stated.

That of course brings to mind the 11 downgrades in the state's credit rating while Christie has been governor.

Perhaps the governor should stop all this campaigning and start governing.

There's more than one way to be addicted to drugs.

PLUS: Christie's tirades against marijuana are becoming a repeat of the movie "Reefer Madness" (see below). At his appearance Monday, the governor went into a rant about how marijuana is "a poison."

This is obvious nonsense.

An entire generation of us baby-boomers, a generation older than Christie, tried marijuana in their youth and somehow survived.

In the half-century since the federal War On Drugs got started, we've learned that marijuana causes few health problems while overeating causes many; If the governor wants to ban Mexican pot, then why doesn't he ban Mexican food?

A hint to the governor: We don't care about the threat of legal marijuana.

We care about all the taxes you are imposing on us.

When you finally come up with a plan to cut my property taxes, I'm all ears.

After you solve that problem, I'll listen to your opinions on drugs.

But at the moment, you sound like you're on them.