

Road to redemption...

By Michael Graham | Tuesday, March 9, 2010 | <http://www.bostonherald.com> | Op-Ed

How do you say “chutzpah” in Mormon?

Mitt Romney is out on a book tour insisting that Romneycare and Obamacare have very little in common. “It’s the difference between a racehorse and a donkey,” is Romney’s line. And besides, the former Bay State governor writes in his new book, “the plan is working.”

I don’t know how many of the working Massachusetts families facing insurance premium hikes of more than 30 percent this year alone - on top of the fastest-rising costs in America since the plan took effect - would say it’s “working.”

But for Romney to say “there’s a big difference between what we did and what President Obama is doing” is . . . well, my Mormon friends would call it a violation of the 9th Commandment.

(Relax, Gov. Paterson. “Coveting your neighbor’s wife” is No. 10.)

But the basic elements of Obamacare are all there: an individual mandate that nearly everyone buy insurance; subsidized insurance based on income; a non-insurance “tax” and employer mandates. The Cato Institute calls it a mirror-image of Obamacare.

Romney, on the other hand, calls the individual mandate “the ultimate conservative plan.” So Barack Obama is a conservative?

Mitt, you gotta lay off the unpasteurized milk . . .

Romney’s making quite a few claims about what Romneycare is doing to Massachusetts, claims that don’t add up. He told Chris Wallace on Fox News Sunday that “the plan this year, for instance, is \$80 million below budget.”

But The Wall Street Journal reports that it’s nearly \$50 million over budget.

Romney then added that the costs are “coming in very much within the range that was forecast when the Legislature and I put this together.” In fact, Gov. **Deval Patrick**’s asking for \$912 million to fund the program for next year - at least \$100 million more than projected when Romney was governor.

And that’s just what it’s costing us as taxpayers. Romneycare is also driving up our insurance premiums and the cost of our actual health care, too. So will Obamacare. But Romney, a Republican candidate for president, is defending the former and attacking the latter.

In his defense, Romney admitted to Fox that about half of the real costs of “extending coverage to the uninsured” (aka forcing young, healthy people to buy expensive insurance they don’t need) is covered by federal tax dollars. In other words, as expensive as it is, without federal subsidies it would cost even more.

So when there’s a federal Obamacare plan, who do we taxpayers turn to for our subsidies? China? The United Nations? Mr. Spock and the United Federation of Planets?

No, we’ll be stuck with the entire tab - both for Massachusetts and all of America.

Romney is right to be worried about the politics of Romneycare. Tea Party voters, the most motivated group in American politics today, are energized by their opposition to a health care system driven by government mandates. Scott Brown voted for Romneycare, it’s true. But he was elected because he promised to oppose Obamacare.

It’s called “redemption.” Romney should stop defending the mess he left us in Massachusetts and start apologizing for it.

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