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Political Reporter at Raw Story

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Mitt Romney's Breathtaking Health Care Hypocrisy

We're all used to a certain level of dishonesty from politicians, but the sheer volume and depth of duplicity coming from Mitt Romney lately on health care reform is nothing short of staggering.

In recent public appearances, he's been railing against President Obama's proposal as "a big government takeover of health care" and an entirely ineffective approach. It's not that he's alone, it's that just a few years ago Romney supported and signed into law an extremely similar health care bill for his state as governor of Massachusetts.

Like President Obama's plan now, the Romney plan relied solely on private insurers to cover the uninsured. Both comprise a three-fold combination of insurance regulations to prevent the exclusion or denial of care to sick people, subsidies for low-income individuals and an individual mandate to bring younger and healthier people into the risk pool. Both are conservative, market-based ideas that don't expand government-run health insurance.

Don't take my word for it. The conservative *Wall Street Journal* editorial board proclaimed that "commonwealth's 2006 program" -- as "championed by former GOP Governor Mitt Romney" -- "closely resembles what Democrats are trying to do in Washington." Still not convinced? Here's the conservative/libertarian Cato Institute: "In 2006, the Bay State enacted a slate of reforms that almost perfectly mirror the plan of Obama and congressional Democrats."

Yet Romney hailed his bill as the "ultimate conservative plan" that's "working well" on Fox News Sunday, while insisting the difference between his and Obama's plan was "the difference between a racehorse and a donkey." It would be one thing for Romney to admit he changed stances and denounce his 2006 bill as he's now denouncing Obama's, but instead

he's pretending that's not the case -- and making a fool of himself in the process.

Probed by Fox's Chris Wallace, Romney claimed the "big difference" is that Obama's plan is on a federal level while his was on a state level. This clearly manufactured gripe might even have a little more sway if Romney's plan was a state-funded endeavor. It's not -- it has relied on millions of federal dollars.

The other differences Romney pointed to was that his plan, unlike Obama's, had "no new taxes" and "no controls over insurance premiums, price controls, cost controls." Firstly, neither of those is significant to the functioning of the plans. Second, Romney's lack of cost control wasn't a good thing; it has led to avoidable cost increases for health insurance in Massachusetts. As for the taxes, that's what makes Obama's proposal paid-for and more fiscally responsible.

It didn't stop there. Romney also hailed his plan as the "ultimate pro-life effort" Sunday, when the facts say the exact opposite. The state of Massachusetts notes that "[a]ll Commonwealth Care health plans include" coverage for, among other things, "abortion."

Then there's the issue of the individual mandate, which both the Romney and Obama plans include (as is necessary for them to work). But Romney refused to even defend its constitutionality when Think Progress inquired recently. Get that? Romney *wouldn't say whether his own health care bill was constitutional*. Of course, that's no coincidence, because in December Republicans voted unanimously to declare the mandate in the Democratic Senate bill unconstitutional, and have since maintained that claim.

The reason all this is relevant is that Mitt Romney is the odds-on favorite to win the Republican nomination in 2012. During his 2008 campaign he conveniently flip-flopped on abortion and couldn't keep his stances straight on a host of other issues, while flagrantly lying about some of his own stances. Clearly, he hasn't become any more honest since. And he may have a real shot at the presidency regardless, especially if Democrats continue to founder as they have been.

Fellow Massachusetts politician Barney Frank summed him up: "The real Romney is clearly an extraordinarily ambitious man with no perceivable political principle whatsoever," he said. "He is the most intellectually dishonest human being in the history of politics."

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