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## Q&A: How the S.C. Tea Parties took on the GOP over HIX - and won

By *Tom Sullivan, Editor*  
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Shakespeare's famous words about greatness in *Twelfth Night* are easily applied to Karen Martin. The vice president of Reidville Elementary Precinct, Martin also heads up the Spartanburg Tea Party – and it's the latter calling that appears to have “thrust upon” her a certain fame this week, as the GOP candidates make their way to South Carolina.

Martin's home state, however, is not exactly welcoming territory to the likes of primary-leading Mitt Romney, about whom Martin spoke to *The New York Times*, saying, “I don't know a single Tea Party person who does not despise Mitt Romney to the very core of their being.”

**[Elections 2012: KevinMD on healthcare in N.H., the likelihood of health reform repeal.]**

Nor are the primaries the first time South Carolina Tea Party chapters have opposed the GOP. Rather, after Republicans got behind legislation to stand up a health insurance exchange (HIX), the Tea Parties took matters into their own hands – ultimately stopping the legislation before it got to a vote.

*Government Health IT* Editor Tom Sullivan spoke with Martin about how they managed that reversal and why, the reasons America has the best health care in the world and the real problems with that system.

**Q: No sooner did the New Hampshire GOP primary results get tallied, than attention turned to South Carolina, and the Tea Party in particular. What's the overarching healthcare theme in South Carolina?**

**A:** Last legislative session a bill was introduced by one of our Democrats to set up a health [insurance] exchange in South Carolina and, sadly, 13 Republicans jumped on board and co-sponsored that bill. So the Tea Party got to work and we worked on those 13 and one-by-one they took their names off of that legislation and it died before it had a vote. Our point was – and I will tell you that one of the articles that informed me the most was by Michael Cannon [of the Cato Institute] – we have a very strong Tea Party network here in South Carolina, so we spearheaded that and other Tea Party ground took it up. That's just to give you the state of politics in South Carolina. We actually do have a RINOs, people who were Democrats for years and a couple session ago saw which way the wind was blowing, just changed over to

Republicans but kept governing as Democrats. So we have a whole set of unusual problems here in our very red state.

So once that happened, we made it very clear to Governor Haley that, "We do not want this, we do not want this, we do not want this." When Governor Sanford was in office he accepted some of those monies that were sent out as a grant. I think the feds intended for the states to set up these exchanges because if the states didn't cooperate the feds wouldn't have the resources to do it. The feds made it sound like, "If you don't set up these healthcare exchanges, we're going to do it for you." And some of our politicians said, "That sounds great because we want to be able to control it," and they tried to get this political meme out there that "We're going to do our state a favor and get these funds to set up these health exchanges because, if not, the feds will do it." And, you know, Michael Cannon pointed out that it really doesn't matter who sets them up because the laws and the rules are written in D.C.

So we had, I think, a million-dollar grant accepted under Governor Sanford's administration and we tried to convince Governor Haley to send that money back. We know exactly what our state needs to do. She didn't listen to us, she set up a panel, for about seven or eight months. She did have some good cross-representation on the panel, at least one of our Tea Party leaders on a subcommittee and, lo and behold, the panel decided that South Carolina doesn't need to set up a healthcare exchange. Well, we could have told you that a million dollars ago.

**Q: Why are you and the Tea Party so vehemently against a health insurance exchange?**

**A:** For several reasons. One, it is not a free market solution in the way that we look at free market solutions. It's really not a healthcare issue, it's a health insurance issue. We have 28 individual mandates in the state of South Carolina that an insurance company has to meet in order to do business in this state. You can imagine at least 22 of those are completely ridiculous and only apply to certain niche patients. So if our legislators and our governor really want to provide a free market solution, they would attack those mandates, get rid of them and then allow us to buy insurance across state lines.

The second reason is because we do not want to do anything that will further Obamacare. We don't want to cooperate in any way, we don't want any monies to touch our state at all, so anything the federal government wants us to do to cooperate with them, we say "No, it's bad economically. It has nothing to do with health care or how health care is delivered. It's really unconstitutional to begin with."

**Q: One of the things I wonder about is, amidst all the politicking, what aspects of health reform get lost to most Americans?**

**A:** Here's the thing, and again it comes back to using the right words: America did not have a healthcare crisis. We have the best healthcare ever in the world, and the only person that could question that is someone pushing reform out of dubious political expediency. Our healthcare system is phenomenal. What we do have, because of the way our insurance is set up, by routing through the employer, by using HMOs, these third parties to keep patients financially distant from their doctors and not understanding what they're actually paying for services, we have a health cost crisis. That's what we have. The way to solve that is the free market.

**[See also: [Even some right-leaning docs in N.H. against ACA repeal.](#)]**

It's not defined correctly, because of refusal to look at it as a free-market issue, wherein you are a customer and your doctor is a service provider and if you take out this whole misnomer of it being a health "care" issue, and understand that it's a health cost and insurance issue, if that free market were accomplished and we got rid of this legislation, we would not have a crisis. And then there would plenty of the resources that are currently being strangled through regulation freed up for those people who need help. America is a very generous country. There would be plenty of resource to take care of the citizens in our country who truly cannot afford health care at the basic level.

**Q: One legislator here in downstate New York said Republicans are doing everything they can to fight health reform just to get the White House back, and that "even if Obama found a cure for cancer, the Republicans would find fault with it..."**

**A:** That is just another example of a Democrat using a straw man hypothetical to avoid really arguing the real issues. That's a ridiculous statement with no facts, no research. It's just the emotional ranting of someone who does not have a solution to the problem.

We have to clearly define the problem. That's the ridiculousness of how bloated our government is: problems are never clearly defined and people try to solve something that is not an issue to anyone except the lobbyists who get paid for investigating it and trying to solve it.

Unbelievable, it's just a stinking mass of corruption that no one will ever, ever fully understand in our generation – if we survive to have history write the truth.

*For more of our primaries coverage, [visit the Elections 2012 page](#).*

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