



## Transition team turns to trouble

By Steve Benen

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Mitt Romney **hired** Mike Leavitt to head a White House transition team, and at first blush, this doesn't seem especially controversial. Leavitt is the former governor of Utah and led HHS during the Bush administration, and by all appearances, seems like a competent choice.

If anything, it seemed possible this might lead to questions about Romney being presumptuous -- around this time four years ago, Barack Obama caught **all kinds of hell** for picking a transition team, even though it's been a standard move for major-party nominees for decades.

But as Sahil Kapur **noted**, the Leavitt pick is causing a stir today for a very different reason.

Mitt Romney is under fire from conservatives for selecting a man to run his White House transition team who has championed a key element of "Obamacare" and benefited financially from the law -- and the Romney campaign is already working to ease the right's concerns.

[Leavitt] runs the health care consulting firm Leavitt Partners, which advises states on how to set up the insurance market exchanges in the signature Affordable Care Act.

The Wall Street Journal reported last year that Leavitt "strenuously backed the core piece of President Barack Obama's health-care law and urged the states to move forward together in adopting health insurance exchanges." And his stance hasn't changed: "We believe that the exchanges are the solution to small business insurance market and that's gotten us sideways with some conservatives," Leavitt's top aide Rich McKeown told Politico.

The Cato Institute is **outraged**, as is **Erik Erickson**. Conservative media outlets -- including the **Washington Examiner** and **National Review** -- aren't pleased either.

As uproars go, possible transitions teams are practically the definition of inside baseball, but the fact that so many on the right are responding so aggressively to Leavitt lets us know a few things.

First, if Leavitt was in line for a top post in a Romney administration -- say, White House chief of staff, for example -- the Republican base has made it clear they don't much care for him.

Second, if Romney intended to keep popular parts of the Affordable Care Act in place, the base appears to be signaling that won't work, either.

And finally, supporting health care exchanges is hardly liberal. We're talking about private insurers competing in a health care marketplace -- an idea conservatives have traditionally *supported*. That Leavitt has championed exchanges doesn't -- or at least, shouldn't -- position him as an underhanded enemy of the GOP cause.

Nevertheless, the Romney campaign is **trying** to put out this fire quickly, telling the right this morning that Leavitt's role does not signal any tolerance for "Obamacare."