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Conservatives Attack Romney's Choice to Lead Transition

By [MICHAEL D. SHEAR](#)

Mitt Romney's choice of Michael O. Leavitt as his transition chief has spurred loud opposition from some conservatives over Mr. Leavitt's support of a crucial part of President Obama's health care plan.

Mr. Leavitt, a former governor of Utah who was secretary of health and human services in George W. Bush's cabinet, is now a health care consultant who advises states on how to implement Mr. Obama's health law.

In an speech to the National Governors Association last year, Mr. Leavitt said that the health care "exchanges" at the heart of what conservatives call "Obamacare" were a good idea and should be implemented by state officials.

The exchanges, [he told](#) the governors, are "a very practical solution to a problem that needs to be solved."

Those comments have some conservatives seeing red in the wake of Mr. Romney's decision to tap Mr. Leavitt to oversee a transition process if Mr. Romney wins the election this November.

Ben Domenech, a conservative blogger, wrote on RedState Monday morning that Mr. Leavitt's support for parts of the president's health care law was "a matter of significant concern for those on the right" and said it raised questions about Mr. Romney's promise to repeal the law if he gets into office.

"Today, there is little question that opponents of 'Obamacare' exchange implementation have won the battle," Mr. Domenech [wrote](#). "But it is concerning that this was a battle won over the heavy opposition of someone who may end up determining Obamacare's replacement."

The hand-wringing has spread to other conservative outlets.

Dean Clancy, a health care expert who works for the Tea Party group FreedomWorks, told [Talking Points Memo](#) that Mr. Leavitt's appointment raised concerns about Mr. Romney's commitment to conservative causes.

"The Tea Party grass-roots have always feared that Governor Romney would be a weak standard-bearer because of RomneyCare," Mr. Clancy said. "This choice only reinforces those doubts. Tapping a high-profile ObamaCare profiteer is disturbing, there's no way around it. ... The Tea Party has been fighting exchanges in state after state."

The Cato Institute, a libertarian research group, posted an item on its blog with the headline: "Romney Etch-a-Sketches His Opposition to ObamaCare with Leavitt Pick." In the post, Michael F. Cannon wrote that "ObamaCare opponents should be outraged."

"Romney's appointment of Leavitt is a first step toward flip-flopping — or Etch-a-Sketching, or Romneying(TM), or whatever — on ObamaCare repeal," he wrote. "But it's hard to blame Romney for thinking Republicans won't care. These are, after all, people who picked Mitt Romney as their presidential nominee."

The Weekly Standard, a conservative magazine, [wrote](#) on Sunday that "Leavitt, in short, was exactly the type of Republican the Tea Party was founded to oppose, and he's playing a key role in planning a potential Romney presidency."

Andrea Saul, a spokeswoman for Mr. Romney's campaign, said Mr. Leavitt's views will not have any bearing on Mr. Romney's promise to repeal the health care law.

"Governor Romney alone decides policy," Ms. Saul said. "As he's made clear, he is committed to completely repealing 'Obamacare.'"

She pointed out that some conservatives had come out in support of Mr. Leavitt's new role. She forwarded a statement from Representative Paul Ryan, Republican of Wisconsin:

"Mike Leavitt understands that real reform must address the rapidly rising cost of health care by empowering patients — not insurance company bureaucrats or government bureaucrats," Mr. Ryan said. "To advance patient-centered reform, the next president — Mitt Romney — will take action on Day One to remove the partisan roadblock of 'Obamacare.' I know that Mike shares that goal and will work with Mitt Romney to get the job done."