



Don't call it Romneycare, call it stalling

Published: Tuesday, May 08, 2012

By Paul Mulshine/The Star Ledger

When he gave his presidential endorsement to Mitt Romney last fall, our governor defended his new best friend against charges that Romneycare was the basis for Obamacare.

Any effort to equate the two plans was “simply intellectually dishonest,” Chris Christie said.

That’s true. Romneycare is worse, if only because it’s already been implemented and we can see what it contains. Obamacare’s still being rolled out.

Go to the [commonwealth of Massachusetts website](#) and you can see what Romney wrought. His individual mandate to buy health insurance requires residents to work their way through a [five-page form](#) before they learn how badly they’ll be banged by the tax man if they don’t have coverage.

Then there are the surcharges. Massachusetts imposes surcharges on those who already have insurance to subsidize policies for the uninsured. And Massachusetts adds insult to injury for those who pay their own hospital bills. Imagine you break a leg and run up a big hospital bill. If it exceeds \$10,000, then the state imposes yet another surcharge.

And then, of course, there’s the fact that as late as 2009, Romney was urging Obama to copy his program — mandates, surcharges and all. How Romney can criticize Obamacare without laughing is one of the great mysteries of the primary campaign season, one we may see solved in the general election.

Here in New Jersey, we have another mystery: Why is Christie dithering on that bill that would let Obamacare bloom in the Garden State?

That bill to create a Massachusetts-style insurance exchange passed both houses of the Legislature on the Ides of March. Christie could have done to it on that day what the

Romans did to Caesar a couple millennia earlier. But he's given no indication whether he'll veto the bill, which becomes law Thursday if he fails to act.

If Christie lets that happen, he'll lose his reputation as a tax cutter. The board of directors of the exchange created by the bill would have the power to impose whatever surcharges would be necessary to bring Christecare into compliance with Obamacare.

Christie has given hints he might issue a conditional veto. That would send the bill back to the Legislature and buy time to await a U.S. Supreme Court decision on Obamacare. During a town hall meeting in South Plainfield last month, he hinted that's what he'll do.

"We are doing the bare minimum that we are legally required to do to move toward implementation and waiting to see," Christie said in response to a question from the audience. "We've put off all further decisions until after the Supreme Court rules in June to see what they're going to do."

Christie gave no further hints when he appeared last week at an event sponsored by the Cato Institute, a free-market think tank in Washington. In the audience was [Michael Cannon](#), an expert on health care funding at Cato with whom I speak frequently.

When I called him the other day, Cannon gave yet another reason Christie would be wise to veto the bill outright: competitiveness.

In addition to the individual mandate in Obamacare, there's an employer mandate. But through an apparent oversight, the drafters of Obamacare left a loophole (see more on this [here](#)).

"There is no employer mandate in states that don't create exchanges," Cannon said. "If New Jersey does not create an exchange, Christie can point out to employers in other states that they can avoid a \$3,000 penalty by moving to New Jersey."

New York, Gov. Andrew Cuomo has already created an exchange, Cannon said, so New Jersey would have a major competitive advantage if Christie vetoed an exchange here.

Cannon said he wonders why Christie isn't taking the lead in urging his fellow Republicans to oppose the exchanges. Good question. Ours was one of the few Republican governors not to join in the suit against Obamacare. And now he's sitting back, waiting for the court to give him a chance to dodge the issue once again.

But given Christie's closeness to Romney, this may not be so strange after all. Romney's in a tough position. He has to convince voters that state health insurance exchanges with mandates and surcharges are good, while national exchanges with mandates and surcharges are evil.

Can Christie help Romney pull that off? We'll have a good idea by Thursday.

Pre-emptive Moron Perspective Alert: If you wish to parrot the spin coming out of the Romney camp that there is some significant difference between his health plan and Obama's, first read [this piece about Romney's 2009 USA Today](#) op-ed encouraging Obama to follow his lead.

And if you want to argue that Romneycare does not violate the U.S. Constitution but Obamacare does, then read [this piece](#) on the way the Supreme Court would have seen this issue prior to the New Deal. Then you will realize no conservative could make that claim.

Then save the spin cycle for the next time you dry your clothes.