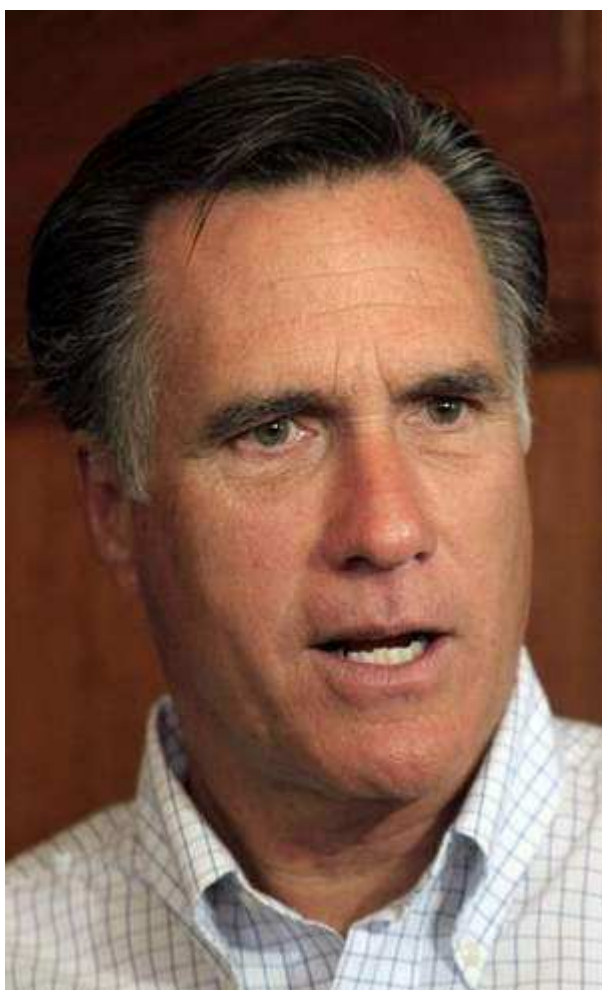


GOP presidential hopeful Mitt Romney plans to lay out health care proposal in Ann Arbor

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Mitt Romney grew up in Michigan.

BY TODD SPANGLER

DETROIT FREE PRESS WASHINGTON STAFF

WASHINGTON -- Mitt Romney returns to Michigan on Thursday to lay out his plans for health care reform, an issue that threatens to swamp his hopes of becoming the Republican nominee for president next year.

He plans to speak at 2 p.m. at the University of Michigan Cardiovascular Center in Ann Arbor, delivering a proposal "to repeal and replace" the health care reform enacted last year by President Barack Obama and the Democratic-controlled Congress.

Health care is a tricky subject for Romney, 64, who grew up in Bloomfield Hills and whose father, George Romney, was a three-term Michigan governor.

In 2006, then-Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney signed into law health care reforms similar to the plan later adopted by Obama and the Democratic Congress. Potential opponents and Republican critics have argued that he should denounce Romneycare as a mistake -- something Romney has been unwilling to do.

Instead, he has taken the stand that his plan was intended as a single-state plan, and that other states should have the ability to try their own solutions.

"I think it's always going to be an albatross around his neck," said Michael Tanner, a senior fellow at the Washington, D.C.-based Cato Institute, which advocates for limited government.

Larry Sabato, with the University of Virginia's Center for Politics, agrees that health care remains a problem for Romney, but not an insurmountable one with such a thin GOP field challenging Obama.

"It's not like there is some giant in the field who is going to sweep the process clean," he said.

Romney, who lost the nomination to Sen. John McCain in 2008, is considered the front-runner at this point with Iowa's caucuses nine months off.