

THE HILL



Conservatives slam Romney transition pick over health law support

By Sam Baker - 06/04/12 12:01 PM ET

Mitt Romney's presidential campaign faced renewed skepticism from conservatives this weekend after tapping former Utah Gov. Michael Leavitt (R) — who has supported parts of President Obama's healthcare law — to lead its transition planning.

Leavitt, who led the Health and Human Services Department under former President George W. Bush, has spent the past few years running a consulting business that helps states implement parts of the Affordable Care Act.

“The fact that Romney picked Leavitt suggests he really doesn't mind ObamaCare that much, and that he is just saying whatever he needs to say to get what he wants. I know. Mitt Romney. Go figure,” [wrote](#) Michael Cannon, a health policy analyst at the libertarian Cato Institute.

Leavitt is on record supporting insurance exchanges — new marketplaces where individuals and small businesses can compare and buy insurance. The Affordable Care Act directs each state to establish an exchange by 2014, and the planning for that effort has proved lucrative for Leavitt.

Conservatives leapt on the issue after news broke that Romney had tapped Leavitt to lead the presidential transition effort.

“What's most concerning about all of this is not that Romney selected one of the few Republicans in the country who backs implementation of Obamacare's exchanges. It's what the selection of Leavitt means as an indication of how Romney would potentially ‘fix’ Obamacare if repeal proves impossible,” conservative blogger Ben Domenech [wrote](#) Sunday. Healthcare is already one of the biggest sources of tension between Romney and the conservative wing of the Republican Party. Romney's GOP rivals argued during the primary that he wouldn't be able to draw a sharp contrast with Obama over healthcare, and some conservatives questioned his commitment to fully repealing the Affordable Care Act.

His campaign moved quickly to tamp down concerns about Leavitt, [telling](#) the National Review: “Gov. Romney alone decides policy. As he's made clear, he is committed to completely repealing Obamacare.”

Since leaving government, Leavitt has made the case for exchanges, including privately run marketplaces. He told the National Governors Association last summer that exchanges are “a very practical solution to a problem that needs to be solved,” according to *The Wall Street Journal*.

Still, many Republican governors are not implementing exchanges until the Supreme Court decides whether the Affordable Care Act is constitutional, even though that decision could invite a greater federal role in healthcare. The federal government will set up its own exchange in any state that doesn't create one.

Although most Republicans attack exchanges as part of Obama's healthcare law, the marketplaces began as a Republican idea. Leavitt's home state of Utah is one of only two states with an exchange that predates the Affordable Care Act. The other is Massachusetts, where Romney created an exchange as part of the 2006 healthcare law that became the model for Obama's reforms.