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Cato Swings At Romney

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By Reid Wilson

An influential conservative think tank is firing a broadside at ex-MA Gov. Mitt Romney (R), criticizing the potential WH'12 contender for a health care plan they say looks identical to Pres. Obama's.

"When you run down this list of elements in the Obama plan and the Romney plan, they are all identical," says Michael Cannon, the Cato Institute's director of Health Policy Studies, in a new video running on the group's website. "Both the Romney plan and the Obama plan are essentially a government takeover of the health care sector of the economy."

Romney's signature achievement during his tenure in the Bay State, CommonwealthCare, has now become a serious liability for a potential WH'12 bid. Romney's approach was controversial among think tank conservatives then; now, with the spotlight on health care, some are convinced it will be a deal-breaker.

"As Pres. Obama himself has pointed out, Romney is the guy who created the prototype for Obamacare," said Cato executive VP David Boaz. "How can he lead the charge against a health care plan that is modeled on his own?"

Romney has pushed back hard, dismissing comparisons between the 2 plans as inaccurate.

"Pres. Obama has tried to compare Gov. Romney's plan to his own but there are important differences. Gov. Romney's plan is different because it didn't include a tax increase, and it didn't cut care to seniors, and most importantly, it is based on the premise that states should be free to pursue their own healthcare solutions," said Eric Fehrstrom, a senior advisor to Romney's Free and Strong America PAC.

"Under Gov. Romney, Massachusetts solved the problem of the uninsured without raising taxes. Other states are free to copy what he did, or improve on it, or chart their own course, but we should reject a federal one-size-fits-all plan," Fehrstrom added.

But another shoe may yet drop. Earlier this week, Jon Kingsdale, the man hired to implement CommonwealthCare, stepped down, and he hinted in his letter of resignation that he may be headed to a more national platform.

"In my next venture, I hope to play some role in national healthcare reform and to continue working with each of you," Kingsdale wrote to his board of directors, according to the *Washington Post*. If Kingsdale is leaving Romney's health care program to take a role in Obama's, the GOP primary attack ads write themselves.

"A lot of times, Obama exaggerates this bipartisan idea, but in this particular case, Obama's got a point," Cato's Boaz says in the video. "RomneyCare did model a lot of the ideas that ended up being the framework for Obama's plan, and that's the connection Romney doesn't want people to see."

In fact, it's a connection, if made in the minds of GOP primary voters, that could derail Romney's entire bid.

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After the jump, watch the Cato video in which Boaz and Cannon flay Romney's CommonwealthCare.



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