

## 'Obamacare' decision a test for Romney

By Carl Golden *TheReporter.Com*

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For Mitt Romney, the Supreme Court decision affirming the constitutionality of the national health care law presents both a test and an opportunity: A test to determine if he'll resist the temptation to build the remainder of his campaign around the repeal of the law, and an opportunity to seize firmer control of the national debate by exploiting President Obama's greatest vulnerability -- a dismal economy.

In the immediate post-decision flush, Romney returned to his "repeal and replace" mantra, promising that his first act in office would be rolling back Obamacare and implementing, well, something not yet fully defined nor adequately explained.

While the country was divided on the overall health care program, key provisions of it enjoyed broad popular support -- coverage for pre-existing conditions, eliminating the cap on total insurance payouts, and allowing children to remain on parents' plans until age 26.

The Obama campaign will surely highlight these provisions in an effort to force Romney into expressing support or opposition to them and place him in an awkward position of calling for repeal of only a part of the law while cherry-picking those sections which appeal to a broader segment of voters. Endeavoring to draw easily understood distinctions between the supportable and the distasteful will only muddy the message. Romney's already been tied up in rhetorical knots over his tortured attempts to explain the differences between the health care program he instituted as Governor of Massachusetts and Obamacare, mostly because they're not that many nor that substantial.

Concentrating on the court ruling and continuing to attack it runs the risk of crowding out the far more potent message -- why should the American people award a second term to a President who ran up the national debt to historic levels while unemployment and home foreclosures rose and consumer confidence and job creation fell.

Addressing the angst felt by Americans over their current financial well-being -- not to mention prospects for what appears to be an increasingly bleak future -- would better serve Romney than becoming bogged down in a tedious and attention-draining debate over a monumentally complex law.

Obviously, health care and its impact should be a part of the campaign and signs have appeared already that Democrats are concerned over the Court's characterization of the penalty for failing to purchase insurance coverage as a tax.

The "T" word is to candidates what the crucifix is to Dracula and the Obama campaign will be hard pressed to blunt Republicans exploiting the Court's use of the term as its rationale for upholding the law's constitutionality. Romney, though, should resist the importunings of his fellow Republicans to become entangled in a semantic exercise over whether the President was guilty of a constitutional overreach with the health care program or whether access to quality health care is to be found anywhere in that document.

The fact of the matter is Obamacare is now the law of the land because the Supreme Court said it is. Not unlike the constitutionality of a woman's right to seek an abortion.

It is all well and good for Romney to decry it as bad public policy, even though he'd be asked to explain why his very similar Massachusetts law is good public policy or why requiring insurance companies to cover expenses associated with pre-existing conditions is a lousy idea.

His competitive position with the President was reached and maintained by convincing voters his private sector business experience, expertise and success in creating jobs are superior to those of the President and give him the qualifications necessary to pull the country out of its economic trough.

At the same time, the Obama campaign assault on Bain Capital, the private equity firm founded by Romney, has been less ineffective than initially hoped, even drawing the wrath of some prominent Democrats who saw it as

misguided criticism of capitalism as the foundation of the American economy and allowing Romney an opportunity to reinforce his business and economic bona fides.

The economic message is more powerful, clearer, neater and goes to the heart of the deepest concerns and fears of the American people. Health care is none of those things and the anger of a very vocal far right will not make it so.

For Romney, there is more to be gained by forcing Obama to defend his stewardship of the economy than there is by forcing him to defend Obamacare.

The Supreme Court and the Massachusetts health care law have already done that.

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The author is a senior contributing analyst with the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. E-mail: [cgolden1937@gmail.com](mailto:cgolden1937@gmail.com).