



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on December 13, 2011

Gingrich Was for Individual Mandate Before He Was Against It

Eight years later another presidential candidate, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, finds himself in a similar gherkin. Gingrich, it seems, was for the ObamaCare individual mandate before he was against it; and his newfound opposition to the mandate appears to be less a matter of conviction than of political opportunism.

According to [CNSNews.com](#), as far back as 1993 Gingrich was stumping for an individual mandate. Appearing on NBC's *Meet the Press* in October of that year, then-House Minority Whip Gingrich said: "I am for people, individuals — exactly like automobile insurance — individuals having health insurance and being required to have health insurance. And I am prepared to vote for a voucher system which will give individuals, on a sliding scale, a government subsidy so we insure that everyone as individuals have health insurance." In other words, if Gingrich had gotten his way, one of the central features of ObamaCare would have been enacted 18 years ago.



Additionally, he still maintains that this was the *conservative* alternative to the single-payer healthcare plan being proposed at that time by the Clinton administration, and specifically then-First Lady Hillary Clinton. Asked about his longtime support of the individual mandate during Saturday's GOP debate in Des Moines, Iowa, Gingrich explained:

I just wanted to make one point that is historical. In 1993, in fighting Hillarycare, virtually every conservative saw the mandate as a less dangerous future than what Hillary was trying to do. The Heritage Foundation was a major advocate of it. After Hillarycare disappeared, it became more and more obvious that mandates had all sorts of problems built in to them. People gradually tried to find other techniques. I frankly was floundering trying to find a way to make sure that people who could afford it were paying their hospital bills, while still leaving an out for libertarians to not buy insurance. And that's what we were wrestling with. It's now clear that the mandate, I think, is clearly unconstitutional. But it started as conservative effort to stop Hillarycare in the 1990s.

Gingrich is correct that the Heritage Foundation had issued a report recommending an individual mandate. The 1989 report, ["A National Health System for America,"](#) suggested: "Every resident of the U.S. must, by law, be enrolled in an adequate health care plan to cover major health care costs."



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Observers have noted that this just goes to show how bankrupt inside-the-Beltway conservatism had already become. No genuine conservative, then or now, would argue for a federal mandate to buy health insurance because it is both patently unconstitutional and also inimical to liberty. That Gingrich bought into the idea at the time and only now has concluded that it's unconstitutional speaks volumes about his kind of conservatism — especially when one considers that in 1993 “the principal advocate in Congress of a federal mandate that individuals buy health insurance was not a conservative, but was Sen. John Chafee, a liberal Republican from Rhode Island,” CNSNews.com observes. Chafee eventually abandoned the idea, saying, “There was no constituency for it. The right was against it. The left was against it.”

Gingrich, however, soldiered on. At a “Healthcare Ceasefire” event in 2005, in the presence of then-Sen. Hillary Clinton, Gingrich [said](#) he was “in favor of finding a way to say ... you ought to have either health insurance, or you ought to post a bond.” Then in a May 2011 appearance — just seven months ago — on *Meet the Press*, while trying to distinguish his approach from the approaches of President Barack Obama and former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, Gingrich reiterated: “I believe all of us have a responsibility to help pay for healthcare.... I’ve said consistently we ought to have some requirement that you either have health insurance or you post a bond or in some way you indicate you’re going to be held accountable.” Asked by host David Gregory if that wasn’t just ObamaCare’s individual mandate, Gingrich replied, “It’s a variation on it.”

All along Gingrich has based his support for an individual mandate on the notion that allowing some to opt out of having health insurance is, as he put it in 2005, “cheat[ing] our neighbors” because taxpayers and those with insurance end up footing the bill for the “free” care given to the uninsured. He told Gregory:

You know, there are an amazing number of people who think that they ought to be given health care. And, and so a large number of the uninsured earn \$75,000 or more a year, don’t buy any health insurance because they want to buy a second house or a better car or go on vacation. And then you and I and everybody else ends up picking up for them. I don’t think having a free rider system in health is any more appropriate than having a free rider system in any other part of our society.

What Gingrich fails to recognize, however, is that the only reason the free-rider problem exists in healthcare in the first place is that the federal government mandates it. The Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act of 1986 requires hospital emergency rooms to render care to all comers regardless of their ability to pay. Repealing that law, along with scores of other federal mandates and regulations that drive up the cost of healthcare and allow individuals to be treated at others’ expense, would virtually eliminate healthcare free riding, thus obviating the perceived need for an individual mandate. Plus, unlike an individual mandate, this approach is constitutional.

So is Gingrich for an individual mandate or against it? Given his 18-year history of outspoken support for it, his sudden realization that it is unconstitutional is hardly convincing. Moreover, his apparent belief that the conservative alternative to big, unconstitutional government is slightly smaller big, unconstitutional government indicates that a Gingrich administration would do little to alter America’s course toward socialism and its inevitable denouement — bankruptcy.

Photo of Newt Gingrich: AP Images



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