



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on September 2, 2011

Now Opposed to ObamaCare, Perry Once Praised HillaryCare

But 18 years ago, Perry, then Texas Agriculture Commissioner, penned a letter to then-First Lady Hillary Clinton that opened: “I think your efforts in trying to reform the nation’s health care system are most commendable.” Perry then asked Clinton to “give particular attention to the needs of the nation’s farmers, ranchers, agriculture workers, and other members of rural communities,” noting that many of them were uninsured and faced shortages of healthcare services. “Again,” Perry wrote in conclusion, “your efforts are worthy.... Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of any assistance.”



[The Daily Caller](#), which posted a copy of the letter, asked Perry’s presidential campaign about the candidate’s 1993 praise for “HillaryCare.” The response from spokesman Dave Carney: “You need to read the letter. He praised her efforts in trying to tackle the issue and urged her not to overlook rural Americans. The letter was at the onset of her efforts before she proposed anything. No one could have imagined the horrible monstrosity she cooked up, in fact not to be outdone until ObamaCare years later.”

Perry himself [pled ignorance](#) of the ultimate outcome of Clinton’s healthcare task force, telling Sean Hannity, “I didn’t want them collectively to overlook a very important constituency. I had no idea that was going to be the end product. What I thought they were truly going to work towards was trying to reform healthcare, and we had no idea, and then now we’ve got ObamaCare.”

To Texans this may seem like déjà vu. Perry’s letter to Clinton first emerged as a campaign issue in 2005, when Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison’s gubernatorial campaign used it against Perry after his campaign tried to tie Hutchison to Clinton. Even then the response from the Perry camp was the same: “In March-April of ‘93, I don’t know that anybody knew what the final efforts were going to be,” Perry campaign manager Luis Saenz told the [Houston Chronicle](#). “That someone would try to improve health care is commendable. To have someone try to have the government take it over, as they ultimately advocated, is not.”

Yet as the *Chronicle* pointed out, Perry’s letter, while “fall[ing] far short of an endorsement of” HillaryCare, “was written at a time when some commentators already were describing her plan of government-sponsored HMOs and health care cooperatives as ‘socialism.’ ”

Furthermore, as [Carrie Dann](#) of NBC News reported just this week, though “the precise details of the plan were unclear at the time,” “some of the broad goals of the legislation were being reported at the same time Perry was penning praise to Clinton.”

Citing a *Los Angeles Times* report from April 5, 1993 — the day before Perry wrote his letter — Dann



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lists some of the then-known objectives of Clinton's healthcare plan:

- Guarantee that a uniform package of basic benefits will be available to everyone, although not all the uninsured will get this coverage right away. Among the basic benefits would be hospital and doctor services, including mental health care, and some prescription drug coverage.
- Create a standardized insurance form and bar insurers from refusing to cover people with pre-existing medical conditions, in order to enable people to change jobs — and insurers — without fear of losing coverage.
- Enact tort reforms to reduce medical malpractice litigation.
- Impose a price freeze on private-sector medical providers while the system of cooperatives is phased in, a process that could take three to five years.
- Phase in a requirement for employers to provide workers with health insurance, with government subsidies to help the smaller businesses.

In short, Perry was praising Clinton's efforts to enact what would later become the central provisions of ObamaCare — and almost certainly knew full well what those provisions were at the time he wrote the letter. "Clinton's efforts were widely criticized by Republicans at the time, and the substance of her reforms obviously constituted a substantial federal intervention into health care, the very thing Perry now claims is obviously unconstitutional and ruinous to liberty," observed the *Atlantic's* [Conor Friedersdorf](#).

That Perry would welcome HillaryCare is not particularly surprising given that he had abandoned the Democratic Party for the GOP just four years earlier, the year after serving as [Al Gore's Texas campaign chairman](#). Perry could simply say that as a recent convert to the Republican Party he supported nationalized healthcare at the time, but he has since changed his mind. Instead, he is sticking with the ignorance approach. Questioned about Perry's letter in light of the fact that the goals of HillaryCare were known at the time he wrote it, Carney told Dann via email: "The letter is very clear. They were trying to reform health care and no one knew how awful the final product would become. Insiders may have speculated on what might come out of the process. Rural voices and concerns deserved to be included."

Few appear to be buying Perry's dumb act. At least one pro-ObamaCare organization, Protect Your Care, is actually touting the Governor's earlier support for nationalized healthcare as a means for Perry "to educate the tea party about the importance of ... the Affordable Care Act and get them to join the bi-partisan coalition along with President Obama supporting it." Obviously these folks think Perry's support for HillaryCare was genuine.

Friedersdorf, meanwhile, sees Perry's flip-flop on the healthcare issue as "another demonstration that he's a phony — that is to say, his rhetoric on federalism and narrow view of what the Constitution permits are exactly what the tea party wants to hear, but his record and penchant for contradicting himself when doing so is politically convenient cast doubt on the depth of his conviction." Indeed, as Friedersdorf points out, despite Perry's stated opposition to Medicaid and government-run healthcare in general, as Governor he "poured a lot more money into Medicaid ... and [proposed](#) to use Texas resources to expand healthcare for Mexican nationals."

Perry's letter didn't hurt him much in 2005 — he cruised to victory in the primary election and was reelected in the general — but then his opinion of a long-defeated federal healthcare plan was of little



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interest to most voters, who were electing a Governor, not a President. Now, with the passage of ObamaCare and Perry's making it a campaign issue — he's also been criticizing Mitt Romney for having launched the prototype in Massachusetts — his past praise for a very similar plan could come back to haunt him.

Photo of Gov. Rick Perry: AP Images



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