

Crist speaks to Tiger Bay, embraces Obama's ACA

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Former Gov. Charlie Crist doubled down on his support of President Obama and national health care today and said Gov. Rick Scott is just plain “bad.”

Crist also told the Capital Tiger Bay Club he didn't vote for Scott, who was elected to succeed him in the Governor's Mansion in 2010. Crist had been elected as a Republican in 2006, became an independent four years later after polls showed him losing the Republican primary to U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio, and is now running against Scott as a Democrat.

Scott supporters have lately been running a television advertisement showing Crist saying Obamacare is “great.” Scott, a wealthy former hospital executive, built his political campaign on opposition to the national health care system in 2009 and 2010.

In his Tiger Bay speech, Crist said a woman in Orlando recently approached him and told him she loved his TV ad — thinking the Scott piece was actually supporting Crist. Crist said he is not spending his campaign money yet, building more for the general election.

Crist faces a Democratic primary with former state Sen. Nan Rich of Weston, who issued a statement Tuesday urging him to meet her in debate. In Tallahassee, Crist smilingly turned aside a question about debating Rich, who has been criticizing him as a new convert to the Democratic Party.

In his speech, Crist hammered at Scott's pre-politics record as CEO of the Columbia/HCA hospital chain, which paid \$1.7 billion in Medicare penalties. Although Scott was not personally implicated in the fraud, Crist said he took the Fifth Amendment 75 times and was a crook.

“He stole from the people — his company did — a ton, and it made him a very wealthy man,” said Crist. “Well, all right — I have my record. He has his.”

Crist also attacked Scott's record on education funding, the environment and government ethics.

After a Cabinet meeting, Scott told reporters Crist opposed in-state tuition for young immigrants when he ran for governor in 2006. Scott, who himself promised in 2010 to bring an Arizona-style immigration crackdown to Florida, said he is trying to provide education opportunity for all young people in Florida.

Florida Republican Party Chairman Lenny Curry echoed the governor's remarks about Crist's past opposition to in-state tuition.

“Charlie's extraordinary lack of self-awareness is something for the record books,” said Curry. “He has a world-class knack for distorting the truth, running away from his record and saying whatever is convenient for his own personal benefit. He opposed in-state tuition while he was running for Governor.”

After his speech, Crist was asked if he's worried about damaging his “nice guy” image by hammering his opponent every day.

“No, because I am a nice guy. Just because I’m nice doesn’t mean I’m not going to be truthful,” said Crist.