After Charlotte

By Mel Lavine

Special to the Times

Mitt Romney adopted a softer tone, certainly not stridently partisan, in an appearance on NBC's "Meet the Press" on Sunday. He said there was much to like in President Obama's health law.

The NBC News program, known for its aggressive interviews, was a rare venue for Romney who is known to favor the more companionable Fox News. But when he was asked by the show's host, David Gregory, what he liked about the president's health package and what he would keep, if elected president, Romney said he liked a number of things: "One is to make sure that those with pre-existing conditions can get coverage."

It may be a concession, but the New York Times in an editorial on Tuesday pointed out a problem: "Guaranteeing coverage to people with serious diseases means that sick people sign up en mass for coverage, driving premiums up for everyone. That's why Mr. Obama's law

required everyone to have insurance to spread the risk around."

Although he supported it in Massachusetts, Romney is now opposed to the mandate. So, his advisors tried to clear up the confusion saying he is in favor of coverage for pre-existing conditions but only for those with continuous insurance coverage. Lost in the translation, the Times said, are "sick people who have lost their jobs or never had coverage. It's been the law since 1996. But those who only watched the interview don't know that."

In a curious twist, Romney criticized Republicans as well as Democrats for calling for automatic cuts in military spending as a way to bring about a deal on reducing the deficit. By doing so, Romney parted company with his running mate, Paul Ryan, a top fiscal conservative in Congress, who favored the cuts.

In his own Sunday television appearance on another network, Ryan repeated his assertion that the deal was the right one in finding common ground with the White House, and calling it a "step in the right direction."

The two have nearly two months to get back on the same page, but Bill Clinton's stemwinder and the error-free Charlotte convention, which have given the president a bump, prompted Romney to say that Clinton "really did elevate the Democratic convention in a lot of ways," though adding, "the contrast may not have been as attractive as Barrack Obama might have preferred."

What I missed from an otherwise probing “Meet the Press” were questions about Romney’s refusal to make public more than two years of income tax filings. Mitt Romney likes to say his father was his role model. But when the elder Romney ran for president he made some ten years of his tax returns public. Romney’s father, a governor and a candidate for the Republican nomination for president, matched the deed to the word that a public office is a public trust. Can Mitt now do less?

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