

RICK SCOTT JUST CAN'T STOP SHOVELING FEDERAL MONEY TO HCA



The resemblance is . . . striking.

Rick Scott, who remarkably is Florida's Governor rather than an inmate in the federal prison system, just can't break out of the behavior that resulted in HCA (where he was CEO) paying a record \$1.7 billion in fines to the federal government for Medicare fraud and taking the Fifth Amendment no less than 75 times in a subsequent deposition. Today, we learn that despite apparently no longer owning a significant amount of HCA stock (pdf), Scott's latest proposal for cutting state funding to hospitals in order to restore funding to education would selectively enrich HCA hospitals while putting in place draconian cuts at public hospitals that provide large amounts of service to the poor and uninsured.

Of course, we knew from even before Scott took office that he planned to punish public hospitals in the state at the expense of private ones (the original Miami Herald article on this topic no longer comes up when searching their site, so one of the multiple online copies is used here):

Florida's government-owned hospitals will be in the political cross hairs after Tuesday's inauguration of Rick Scott, once leader of the nation's

largest for-profit hospital chain.

The governor-elect's transition team has recommended creation of a panel to study whether government-owned hospitals – Miami-Dade's Jackson Health System among them – are necessary.

So, given that Scott has a history of illegally enriching HCA and that we knew from before he was even sworn into office that he wanted to end public hospitals, this should not be a surprise:

Gov. Rick Scott's plan to cut about \$2 billion in public funding to hospitals that care for the poor is devastating and even ridiculous, say hospital leaders who predict patient care will suffer if it is enacted.

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But because most Medicaid dollars come from the federal government, the move would free up about \$422 million in state tax dollars for education. The rest would be federal matching funds that Florida would lose, said Bruce Rueben, president of the Florida Hospital Association.

Oh that's just brilliant, isn't it? Scott wants to lose more than a billion and a half in federal funding just so he can cut hospital funding by a little under half a billion. But those cuts are not administered fairly:

What's more, he and others say, Scott has structured the cuts in a way that hits hardest at "safety net" hospitals that provide the most care for poor people. Yet a few for-profit hospitals – including some owned by Scott's former employer Hospital Corporation of America – would actually get more tax funds under his plan.

Tampa General Hospital and All

Children's Hospital in St. Petersburg would each face estimated cuts of more than \$70 million, according to the Florida Hospital Association. But three Pinellas HCA hospitals – Largo Medical Center, St. Petersburg General and Northside – would each get a few million more.

The obligatory “I have not seen those numbers” quote from Scott denying that he was aware his plan enriches his old partners in crime is not in the least credible.

Only someone as warped as Rick Scott could come up with the idea that the proper way to fund education is to deny healthcare treatment for the poor while enriching healthcare robber barons. Scott's plan has not yet been enacted into to law and there are even suggestions that some Republicans in the legislature won't go along with the plan as structured, so there is a small bit of hope that at least a little bit of sanity can be folded back into Florida's budgeting plan for next year.