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## Republicans' health-care plan: First, repeal overhaul; then . . .

By Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar  
Associated Press

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WASHINGTON - Republicans are promising to repeal and replace President Obama's health-care overhaul if they win control of Congress. But with what? Not even they know.

Some propose major changes to workplace coverage, even turning Medicare into a voucher plan. Many prefer to tiptoe around political land mines. Others want a clean start.

"During the health-care debate, there was just as much division within Republicans as there was between the parties," said Douglas Holtz-Eakin, a top adviser to 2008 GOP presidential candidate John McCain. "It will be more visible now that Republicans may be in charge of one house because those divisions will come to the surface."

One of the first acts of a GOP majority would be a vote to repeal the overhaul. But they haven't said much about what would replace it.

A GOP bill rejected by the Democratic-led House last year is the closest thing to a starting point. The Republican plan would cover an additional three million people by 2019, compared with nearly 33 million under the Obama law. It would lower premiums modestly for many small businesses and people buying insurance directly. It would not solve the nation's long-term cost and coverage problems.

"On a scale of 1 to 1,000, it's about a 5," scoffs former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, a senior Democratic adviser.

Some Republican proposals are as far-reaching as anything Democrats have tried. A budget crisis could push them to the forefront because lowering health costs is critical to reducing record federal deficits.

Many ideas come from Rep. Paul Ryan (R., Wis.). Along with Sen. Tom Coburn (R., Okla.), Ryan sponsored legislation that would begin weaning the middle class from job-based coverage and replace Medicaid with private insurance for most low-income people.

The idea is to foster personal responsibility, so consumers would seek better value for their health-care dollars and push down costs. Their plan would make employer coverage taxable to the employee, but that would be offset with a tax credit available to all Americans. It could be used to buy coverage individually or to keep a plan at work. Some with generous employer coverage could face higher taxes.

In contrast to Democrats' law, there would be no federal mandate that individuals get coverage or employers help pay for it.

The GOP plan is a hard sell. Any attempt to tamper with the tax-free status of employer health care is certain to anger unions. That hasn't deterred Ryan.

On his own, he proposes converting Medicare into a voucher system. People who become eligible starting in 2021 would get a federal payment to buy private insurance. Because of the timing of the transition, most baby boomers would get to keep the current government-run program.

Ryan's proposals draw flak from Democrats intent on preserving the health-care law, and that is making some GOP leaders nervous.

But Ryan says that he represents "a consensus of one person - myself" and that he is trying to promote discussion, not lay down the agenda.

"Repealing Obamacare is a step in the right direction," he said. But, he added, "it's not enough. You have to reform health care itself."

Repeal is not a surefire proposition. Even if the Senate goes along, Obama could veto it, and Republicans aren't likely to have enough votes to override. But they have a backup plan: Use Congress' power of the purse to deny the administration funds to carry out the law.

For now, it looks as if Republicans are pushing hard on the repeal part of their slogan but treading gingerly when it comes to replacing.

Generally, there is Republican consensus for placing limits on jury awards in malpractice cases, strengthening the prohibition against the use of federal funds to pay for abortions, and tight oversight of the Obama administration's efforts to implement the health law.

If that's all, some conservatives will be disappointed. "Republicans won't fix health care if they just

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**joepaper**

Posted 06:16 AM, 09/21/2010

Seems to me the double dip recession started right around when Obama care was signed? How about that?

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**blakelock**

Posted 06:49 AM, 09/21/2010

@joepaper - however the main provisions of the healthcare plan have yet to kick in, so have minimal impact on the recession. A little transparent, but nice try. Maybe it was the two unfunded wars that GWB plunged us into? You know, the wars that (unlike the healthcare bill) were unfunded?

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**truth B told**

Posted 07:20 AM, 09/21/2010

Everyone is dubious of the Obama care package. Especially when you have the house majority leader saying "We have to pass it to find out what's in it." Duh? Come on folks, let's be reasonable here. Would you sign any contract without reading the fine print??? SILENT MAJORITY IS SILENT NO MORE!!!

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**nuggett**

Posted 07:58 AM, 09/21/2010

check out when the democrats took over congress....(Nov 2007 fools and sheep) and check out the numbers then and now and see what they did to make things what they are today.....go ahead, I dare you.....

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**brucek4121**

Posted 08:34 AM, 09/21/2010

Yeah nugget, we lived in a virtual utopian society before that. By the way, the date was actually Jan 2008 when the Dems were sworn in. If you are going to make spurious claims, at least get your facts right.

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**Habba-Dasheer**

Posted 08:42 AM, 09/21/2010

We should simply do away with the government Let the rich and powerful name a board of directors. Such people as the Wal-mart family,Goldman, and bankers could run the country, and make a profit doing it. They wouldn't need a Congress, nor courts, nor elections. One percent controls ninety percent of the wealth anyway, so let them run the country. Then we can all pledge allegiance to the all mighty dollar.

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**Sam D**

Posted 09:50 AM, 09/21/2010

"On his own, he [Ryan] proposes converting Medicare into a voucher system." Sheesh, the man doesn't even listen to his own right-wing tea party base. Remember the signs? "Keep your government hands off my Medicare!" Ah well, ignorance is bliss...

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**psyrus**

Posted 10:28 AM, 09/21/2010

"however the main provisions of the healthcare plan have yet to kick in, so have minimal impact on the recession" --- Actually they have. Businesses have been dealing with Obamacare since it became law. Most businesses have their budgets planned out years ahead of time. I am all for removing healthcare from the employment picture. We should be able to shop around for the best coverage that we can afford. Not have that coverage dictated by our employers or the government. The whole Obamacare process was nothing but a sham. Any sane person that tried to follow it knows that. Even the Dems on these boards can't be so blinded by their partisanship that they can't see the fraud that was perpetrated.

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**intelliwoman**

Posted 10:52 AM, 09/21/2010

When GWB took office we had a huge surplus, when he left we were trillion and trillions in debt. END OF STORY.

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**runpath**

Posted 11:18 AM, 09/21/2010

It seems that lawmakers like Paul Ryan would like to "wean the middle-class from employer-base

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The GRASP (General Robotics, Automation, Sensing, and Perception) lab, upstairs at the University of Pennsylvania's Engineering School, is in the million-hits club at YouTube this summer, as videos of its book-sized quadro-rotor flying robots have been promoted as gadgets that can, as Gizmodo.com cheerfully put it, "fly in your window and kill you as you sleep."



Tools

**runpath** Posted 11:27 AM, 09/21/2010  
 Continuation of my prior comment. If you don't want employers to be saddled with health coverage (think about why Toyota is doing so well, one reason is that the government is providing its employees health coverage), we should have just passed single-payer coverage. With that big a pool (the entire US population) costs would go down, and all our businesses would be unfettered, such as it is with Toyota. Also, privatizing Medicare and giving seniors "vouchers" to pay for their health care is a ridiculous idea. It is denying them care, to save a buck, pure and simple. It is heartless.

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