

House GOP prepares for health care repeal vote

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By Kelly Kennedy, USA TODAY

Republican efforts to stymie the health care law passed last year aren't likely to end with a planned House vote Wednesday to repeal it, even if the effort dies in the Senate, according to opponents and supporters of the law. Instead, Republican opponents are already talking about ways to delay the law's implementation or cut its funding.

The [House of Representatives](#) had planned to vote on the repeal last week, but after Rep. [Gabrielle Giffords](#), D-Ariz., was critically wounded in an assassination attempt, the House called off all business to pay its respects. Debate is now scheduled to begin Tuesday with a vote likely Wednesday.

"Americans have legitimate concerns about the cost of the new health care law and its effect on the ability to grow jobs in our country," said Laena Fallon, House Majority Leader [Eric Cantor's](#) spokeswoman.

When the vote to repeal the law does take place, [congressional](#) watchers said, it will likely pass in the Republican-controlled House, and then not even be brought up in the Senate, where [Democrats](#) hold the majority. Meanwhile, both sides are making plans for what comes next.

"The Republicans see this as a window of opportunity," said Drew Altman, president of the non-partisan [Kaiser Family Foundation](#), referring to midterm election results and polls that show Americans' unhappiness with the law. "The Democrats will try to shift it on its head to talk about popular benefits."

Some of those benefits have been implemented, such as allowing adult children younger than 26 to be on their parents' insurance policies, closing the "doughnut hole" so seniors don't pay so much for prescriptions and allowing Medicare to cover preventive care without a co-pay.

The tone of the debate will be different, both sides say. "I think you'll see a more civil debate than you

would have had otherwise," Rep. [Jeff Flake](#), R-Ariz., said Sunday on CBS' *Face the Nation*.

"All of us need to be more careful about the words that we choose to use, including things like the title of the repeal," Rep. [Debbie Wasserman Schultz](#), D-Fla., said on the same show.

Thomas Scully, who was administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services under President [George W. Bush](#), said he expects Republicans to present funding challenges and attempt to delay key pieces, using potential costs as a driving force. Republicans, including House Speaker [John Boehner](#), say the law will cost "billions," while the non-partisan [Congressional Budget Office](#) says repealing the law would increase the deficit by \$230 billion from 2012 to 2021.

Scully said Republicans and moderate Democrats could try to delay a provision, which is supposed to take effect in January 2014, that extends Medicaid to everyone who falls below 133% of the poverty level — or about \$14,000 a year for a family of four — until the states can afford it. The federal government will fund the first three years of coverage.

Michael Cannon, director of health policy studies at the libertarian [Cato Institute](#), sees other options. "There are lots of things short of an all-out repeal that could throw sand in the gears to slow it down and possibly bring it to a screeching halt," he said. That might include votes on individual mandates and investigations into how the bill is being implemented and how it was passed.

Democrats are using the repeal effort as an opportunity to sell the law and educate people about the benefits that are already in place. Rep. [Jim McDermott](#), D-Wash., spoke with Doctors for America during a Jan. 6 news conference about why the law is necessary. "Our job right now is to play defense," he said.