



## House backs bill redefining full-time workweek under ACA

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WASHINGTON — The House voted Thursday to increase the number of hours someone must work before an employer has to offer health insurance under the Affordable Care Act.

But the 252-172 vote for the bill authored by Rep. Todd Young, R-Ind., fell short of the two-thirds support necessary to override a threatened presidential veto. Twelve Democrats joined all Republicans in voting for the bill.

The Affordable Care Act requires large employers to offer health insurance to those who work at least 30 hours a week. The bill would change that threshold to 40 hours a week.

"Let's restore the 40-hour workweek ... that has long been understood to be the gold standard of the workweek in this country," Young said.

He argued that employers are reducing the hours of workers to get them under the 30-hour threshold, which amounts to "trying to finance health insurance for some Americans by cutting hours and wages for other Americans."

Opponents said the bill would increase the number of uninsured, increase the deficit and give employers a greater incentive than they have now to cut workers hours to avoid having to pay for their health insurance. That's because there are about twice as many uninsured Americans who work around 40 hours a week than who work close to 30 hours a week.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates the change would reduce by about 1 million the number of Americans who get health coverage through their job. Some of them

would remain uninsured while others would end up on government health care programs like Medicaid or the public health exchanges.

"We are asked to encourage employers to cut their employees from 40 hours to 39 hours so they can eliminate their benefits and force taxpayers to pay for it to the tune of \$53 billion," said Rep. Jared Polis, D-Colo.

The bill has not been scheduled for a vote in the Senate, where Republicans need the support of six Democrats to bring it to the floor and even more to override a veto.

Indiana Sen. Joe Donnelly, the lead Democratic sponsor of the Senate version, said his message to the White House is that he's trying to strengthen the Affordable Care Act "so that it works better for the American people."

White House spokesman Josh Earnest pointed out this week that the bill has been criticized by some conservative commentators including Yuval Levin, who wrote in the National Review that the change is "likely to be worse than doing nothing."

"I assume there's no worse criticism that could be leveled by one Republican toward another than to say that something is worse than the Affordable Care Act," Earnest said, "but yet that is the criticism that has been lodged at this Republican proposal."

Michael Cannon, director of health policy studies at the libertarian Cato Institute and a top critic of the Affordable Care Act, questioned whether the change is smart for either policy or political reasons. If more workers have their hours cut, they will blame it on Republicans, he wrote in a blog post.

"How is that a political win, or strategically smart?" he wrote.

The employer mandate begins this year for some businesses with 100 or more full-time workers and starts in 2016 for employers with 50 or more workers.

Most large employers already offer health insurance.

But the retail and restaurant industries have been particularly vocal about the need for flexibility in scheduling workers for less than 40 hours without providing health insurance.

"A 30-hour week just doesn't work for restaurants," said Jack Crawford, chairman of the board of the National Restaurant Association. "It doesn't work for our employees, or hundreds of thousands of businesses that will be forced to make hard decisions to comply with this health care law."