



Conservatives Savage GOP Obamacare Plan Despite Trump Backing

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House Speaker Paul Ryan's new bill to replace Obamacare is being savaged by early bad reviews from a wide range of conservatives, with one Republican senator declaring it "dead on arrival" in the Senate -- if it can make it through the House.

The White House launched its own effort to defend the draft, with Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price saying the bill is "the beginning of the process," one aimed at helping patients and business owners.

But that defense is being overshadowed for now by the vehemence of the measure's GOP critics. Senator Rand Paul derided it as "Obamacare-lite," while a group of House Republicans said it would create a "Republican welfare entitlement." One conservative group labeled it "Ryancare" and said it was merely a "warmed-over substitute for government-run health care."

Price, speaking to reporters at the White House, said, "We look forward to working with them and others," referring to conservative opponents.

"This is all about patients," he said, arguing that the legislation must allow a transition from the insurance system created by the Affordable Care Act. He also argued that the Republican bill's tax credits would serve to "equalize the tax treatment" of health benefits provided by employers and insurance people buy on their own.

Employer health plans are excluded from income tax, while people who buy insurance on their own must use after-tax dollars.

The pressure is now clearly on Republicans to deliver their long-promised repeal, and the party seems deeply divided over this new draft measure. The bill was blasted by a number of

influential conservatives groups, including Heritage Action, the Club for Growth, FreedomWorks, and the libertarian Cato Institute.

“Everyone needs to take a step back,” wrote Michael Cannon, Cato’s director of health policy studies and a strong critic of Obamacare. “This bill is a train wreck waiting to happen.”

The two House committees who devised the plan will begin considering it Wednesday, and the leaders of those panels were dismissive of the criticism in a news conference Tuesday morning.

Energy and Commerce Chairman Greg Walden said Republicans are "moving in the right direction," and tartly suggested critics should "actually read the bill." Ways and Means Chairman Kevin Brady dismissed the Obamacare characterizations, saying it’s "Obamacare-Gone."

Even so, Ryan, Walden and Brady found themselves hastily scheduling an additional late-afternoon news conference not long after Paul and members of the conservative House Freedom Caucus scheduled their own press event to criticize the bill.

"We just want a clean repeal" and vote on a replacement later, Paul told Bloomberg TV. "We agree on repeal, we don’t agree on replace." Senator Mike Lee of Utah called the GOP draft “a step in the wrong direction.”

Before the day even began, an analysis written late Monday for an even larger bloc of U.S. House conservatives -- the 170-member Republican Study Committee -- derided a key component of a new Republican plan. It blasted as a new form of welfare entitlement the idea of offering tax credits to individuals who wouldn’t otherwise have access to health insurance.

Whether Ryan and his leadership team expected such swift and decisive blowback is unclear. But they’re hoping that the rebels in their own party will feel the pressure to deliver on their seven years of promises to repeal Obamacare.

"We just have to work through it all," said Senate Finance Chairman Orrin Hatch, downplaying the amount of turmoil. But he added what already now seems obvious. "The bill as presented is not the final bill."