



The new Republican health care bill is getting a lot of blowback from... Republicans?

Nik DeCosta-Klipa

March 7, 2017

House Republicans released their long-anticipated health care bill Monday night, which they say fulfills the party's promises to repeal and replace former President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act.

The plan — which seeks to provide a conservative version of health care reform — was immediately met with condemnation from the Democratic Party. But the Republican-backed bill also received broad blowback from a less-expected source: Republicans.

Despite support from Congressional Republican leaders and President Donald Trump, the “American Health Care Act” was panned for a variety of reasons by several different GOP circles — from staunch conservatives to moderates to health care wonks.

For starters, several Republican lawmakers criticized the bill for not outright repealing the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare, which has been a central pledge by Republicans since the party took control of the House in 2010.

In a press conference Tuesday afternoon, members of the House Freedom Caucus, the far-right branch of the Republican Party, ripped the proposal and pledged to introduce legislation that “actually repeals” the Affordable Care Act.

They were joined by Sen. Rand Paul, who is cosponsoring a “clean repeal” bill. The Kentucky Republican had earlier called the newly-introduced GOP health care plan “Obamacare Lite” (meanwhile, Freedom Caucus member Rep. Justin Amash called it “Obamacare 2.0”).

Paul said the bill would not pass and criticized it for letting aspects of the Affordable Care Act stay intact.

In a statement, Sen. Mike Lee, a fellow libertarian-leaning Republican, said the new bill was “a missed opportunity and a step in the wrong direction.”

Conservative think tanks, including FreedomWorks, the Heritage Foundation, Americans for Prosperity, and the Cato Institute, slammed the bill for similar reasons.

“This bill is a train wreck waiting to happen,” wrote Cato health policy director Michael Cannon.

Meanwhile, another corner of the Republican Party expressed concerns Tuesday that the bill *didn't* maintain certain aspects of Obama's landmark act.

In a letter Monday to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, Republican Sens. Rob Portman, Shelley Moore Capito, Cory Gardner, and Lisa Murkowski said they were worried the new bill did not protect those that gained health care coverage through the Affordable Care Act's expansion of Medicaid.

“Reform should not come at the cost of disruption in access to health care for our country's most vulnerable and sickest individuals,” the four senators wrote, later adding that the House draft did not “meet the test of stability for individuals currently enrolled in the program.”

“We will not support a plan that does not include stability for Medicaid expansion populations or flexibility for states,” they wrote, despite their desire to see the Affordable Care Act repealed and replaced.

Republicans hold a slim 52-48 majority in the Senate. With at least six defections already, they wouldn't even be able to pass a replacement bill through the budget reconciliation process, which only requires a simple majority.

As Vox.com editor (and former health care reform reporter) Ezra Klein summarized Tuesday, the House GOP bill was also met with harsh disdain from Republican-leaning health care experts.

“House GOP's Obamacare Replacement Will Make Coverage Unaffordable For Millions — Otherwise, It's Great,” reads the headline of prominent Affordable Care Act critic Avik Roy's review on Forbes.

According to Roy, the positive aspects of the bill are “overshadowed” by the limitations of passing the bill through reconciliation, which only allows them to repeal the law's taxes and spending. Roy says the new bill's provisions would also “price many poor and vulnerable people out of the health insurance market” and could create so-called death spirals for the industry.

Bob Laszewski, who Klein describes as “a pragmatic health industry consultant who specializes in insurance market design” put his assessment more bluntly.

“It won't work,” he wrote.

Laszewski called the Republican plan “attractive,” but potentially “worse than Obamacare itself,” pointing to the same potential death-spiral scenario of the bill’s individual mandate alternative.

The Republicans now want to create a scheme that doesn’t require anyone to sign up. But when they get sick enough that they need insurance, they will be able to quickly do so by paying a paltry 12-month 30% premium surcharge.

And, the Republican’s guarantee issue scheme of buy it whenever you need it will make the Republican program just as financially unsustainable—too many won’t buy it and those who do will be disproportionately sick.

Laszewski also said that the bill would be just as politically unstable as the law they were seeking to replace, both due to its content and the process of passing it through reconciliation.

“Half the country will hate it—just a different half,” he wrote.

Well — apparently — not necessarily a different half.