Broad Conservative Criticism Mounts Against GOP Health Bill

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As lawmakers furiously debate the American Health Care Act, a growing number of health policy experts and other conservatives are sounding their concerns with the policies and passage process for the House GOP health bill.

Key among those concerns is that the bill leaves too much of Obamacare in place, primarily the regulations and mandates that imposed new rules on health insurance markets.

Overall, Americans are paying 44.5 percent to 68 percent more in health premiums just from Title I insurance regulations, according to new Heritage Foundation analysis.

"President [Donald] Trump pledged during the presidential campaign to deliver legislation that 'fully repeals Obamacare,'" wrote Michael Cannon with the Cato Institute.

"But Republican leaders are doing something else: pushing a bill that leaves much of Obamacare in place."

Cannon points out that the House GOP bill retains Obamacare's health insurance regulations. "Obamacare's regulations are the driving force behind its skyrocketing premiums and low-quality coverage. Yet the Republican bill would preserve them with only slight modifications."

Other leading conservative scholars also have weighed in:

Avik Roy, Forbes opinion editor with the Foundation for Research on Equal Opportunity, argued the House Freedom Caucus, which is made up of conservative House members, was right to care about the insurance regulations.

"The good news is that the House Freedom Caucus is right to care about this problem. Obamacare's regulations do increase premiums in ways that make health insurance unaffordable for millions. The [American Health Care Act's] treatment of Obamacare regulations absolutely can be improved," Roy noted.

National Affairs Editor Yuval Levin, with the Ethics and Public Policy Center, also pointed out that the American Health Care Act does not reverse Obamacare's "core federalization of insurance coverage."

He argued the hurried process to pass the bill will likely undermine its success. "This could have started better, and it needs to end smarter," he wrote.

"If Republicans rush a plan through Congress with major flaws, it will likely backfire on them, and perhaps lead to another round of legislation that is far less to their liking," added Jim Capretta with the American Enterprise Institute.

"The bill's lack of full repeal, the premium increases scheduled to take effect over the next two years, and the spending 'cliff' hitting in 2020 leave the bill with little natural political constituency to support it," said Chris Jacobs with the Texas Public Policy Foundation.

Some have lodged excuses that insurance regulations would not pass the reconciliation process in the Senate. Ramesh Ponnuru, American Enterprise Institute visiting scholar and senior editor at National Review, hit back at those excuses, saying, "Republicans can change or eliminate more of Obamacare's regulations with a simple majority vote."

He continued, "They don't have to wait for a second and third stage of policy change to make needed reforms. They can write a bill that would do more to lower premiums, get a better [Congressional Budget Office] score on coverage, and do more to repeal Obamacare than their current one."

Even journalists opposed to Obamacare have little enthusiasm for the American Health Care Act.

"You're not exactly seeing enthusiastic cheers from the journalists who opposed Affordable Care Act, of which I am one," writes Bloomberg View columnist Megan McArdle. "See? This is me, emphatically not cheering. If such is possible, I am actively failing to cheer."

The culminating message from many is that the House must pause and rewrite the health bill so that it pulls out more of Obamacare's infrastructure.

As the Washington Examiner editorial board urged members of Congress, "Republicans ought to take their time and write a better bill that, unlike the [American Health Care Act], actually repeals Obamacare and institutes real reform of the broken health care system."