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Bless Rep. Austin Scott's heart

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On Saturday evening, Rep. Austin Scott, R-Ga., took aim at the chairman of the House Freedom Caucus on Twitter, writing, “Mark Meadows betrayed Trump and America and supported Pelosi and Dems to protect Obamacare.”

Rep. Meadows and most of the members of the House Freedom Caucus opposed the American Health Care Act because they rightly believed it didn't go far enough to, you know, actually repeal Obamacare. Roughly half of the opposition to the bill inside the House Republican Conference came from liberal-leaning Republicans, include Appropriations Committee Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen, R-N.J., who hasn't yet been the target of Scott's Twitter temper tantrum.

The bill Scott supposed would have repealed Obamacare's costly tax and cost-sharing subsidies and replaced it with a new, Republican version of the entitlement. It zeroed out Obamacare's individual mandate and replaced it with an Orwellian “continuous coverage incentive,” a 30 percent surcharge insurance companies were required to charge for 12 months in the event that an enrollee didn't have coverage for more than 63 consecutive days.

While the American Health Care Act did repeal most of Obamacare's taxes and reformed Medicaid, it left some some of the worst elements of the law in place, such as its regulatory structure in Title I, which is responsible for 44 percent to 68 percent of premium increases, according to a recent analysis by the Heritage Foundation. Meadows and the House Freedom Caucus were fighting for repeal of at least some elements of Title I, including the so-called essential health benefits and community rating, which are two drivers of the cost of insurance premiums.

While the Medicaid reforms in the bill were positive, the repeal of Medicaid expansion was set for January 1, 2020, the beginning of a presidential election year. During the transition period, states that had already expanded Medicaid would have been allowed to continue enrolling individuals into the program under the expansion perimeters. This created the incredibly likely scenario that repeal of Medicaid expansion would have never actually happened, much like Medicare's Sustainable Growth Rate cuts never happened or some sequester spending cuts never happened.

Ultimately, Americans would have judged Republicans on whether or not the American Health Care Act brought health insurance premiums down. From this perspective, the bill was a disaster

waiting to happen. As the Cato Institute's director of health care studies, Michael F. Cannon, noted, "[T]he AHCA would be worse than doing nothing."

Sadly, Saturday evening wasn't the first time Scott criticized Meadows. Right after the bill was pulled from a floor vote Thursday, Scott complained, "This is about a couple of self-serving people like Mark Meadows who are pulling a cheap political stunt for their own glorification at the expense of the country."

Classy.

Meadows and the House Freedom Caucus should be praised for trying to make the American Health Care Act a palatable bill to conservatives. They knew that without going after Obamacare's regulatory structure, premiums wouldn't decrease.

Of course, Scott would probably say that the much talked about second phase of Obamacare repeal would have addressed this concern. Well, not really. While the text of the law gives wide discretion to the secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), currently Dr. Tom Price, the authority for this discretion exist in statute.

What this means is the next Democratic administration, which could enter in office in January 2021 or January 2025, could roll back any HHS actions under the Trump administration. Moreover, any administrative action will be subject to legal challenges, which could slow down these regulatory efforts. Either way, the relief will be temporary, hardly giving any long-term confidence in the marketplace.

The good news, if the replies to his tweet are any indication, is that conservatives are, by and large, not buying what Scott is saying. Perhaps he should begin to walk back his comments, apologize to Meadows, and begin to mend fences with conservatives in his district. Maybe Scott should stay off Twitter for a while, too.