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# Republicans remain fractured on Obamacare repeal; considering 'collapse and replace' option

Jon Street

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Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) says he knows how to force Democrats to work with Republicans on a plan to replace Obamacare, but other Republicans aren't so sure that taking the bipartisan route is such a good idea, given what the GOP promised throughout the 2016 campaign.

During an interview with TheBlaze, Graham recommended his fellow Republicans let Obamacare collapse under its own weight. Graham said that if changes can't be made to the House GOP health care bill currently being debated in the lower chamber, then Republicans should simply adopt the tactic of pointing the finger at Democrats when Obamacare ultimately collapses.

The House Republicans' bill — the American Health Care Act — was introduced last week but has been the subject of criticism among many of the more conservative members in the House Freedom Caucus, who have stated publicly that they will not vote for the legislation in its current form.

A number of Republican lawmakers in the House and Senate have referred to the bill as "another entitlement" and even "Obamacare Lite."

Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) introduced a separate bill that would repeal Obamacare but not replace it. Paul said the two should be done separately.

"[After repeal] we can have a separate vote on replacement legislation that will deliver lower costs, better care, and greater access to the American people," Paul said.

Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH) introduced the same bill in the House. Several moderate House Republicans have announced their opposition to the Jordan bill.

Graham said he agrees with members of the House Freedom Caucus and does not support the AHCA legislation in its current form. Graham laid out an alternative approach to repealing and replacing Obamacare, which Democrats passed in 2010 with no Republican support whatsoever.

"What I would suggest," Graham said, "is if we can't improve the House bill, and I would urge the speaker to let the Freedom Caucus have the relevant votes, that we let this program, designed by Democrats exclusively, voted on by Democrats exclusively, fail, and challenge Democrats to

help clean up the mess they created. That's the only way you'll get a bipartisan result is collapse and replace."

Graham added that by passing the American Health Care Act, Republicans would be doing what Democrats want them to. "They want [President Donald] Trump to fail," he said. "They want us to replace Obamacare with something that we own. Whether that's right or wrong, that's their attitude."

Graham's thinking seems to be in line with a comment Trump made at a news conference shortly before taking office in January.

"We don't wanna own it [health care], we don't wanna own it politically. They own it right now. The easiest thing would be to let it implode in 2017," Trump said, according to CNN.

But Freedom Caucus members such as Rep. Louie Gohmert (R-Texas)
believe Republicans  should follow through on the promise they made to the voters in November. Gohmert told TheBlaze:

"First, we promised that if you give us the majority in the House, we'll repeal it. Then we promised, "Oh, well, we have to have the Senate." We got it. Then we said, "Well, we really need the presidency because we sent [a full repeal bill] over two years ago and [former President Barack Obama] vetoed it."

And then we get all three and say, "Well, now that we got all three, we're not going to really and truly repeal it." So it comes back to wanting to keep our promise. That's where I am. I want to keep all of us that had been promising when we had the House, Senate and the presidency we would repeal it, and I want to keep us all from being liars."

Gohmert acknowledged that House Republican leaders realize "they've got problems," especially when it comes to earning the support of the Freedom Caucus on the AHCA. Gohmert said that he will not vote for the legislation in its current form.

Meanwhile, House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) has said leaders are "fine tuning" the health care legislation so that it has enough support to pass the House. Ryan declined to say Thursday during an interview with CNN whether it could pass the lower chamber as is.

"It's not coming up this afternoon," Ryan told CNN's Jake Tapper. "It's going through the legislative process. That legislative process has not been finalized. That's, no offense, kind of a goofy question or faulty premise because this goes through four committees. We've gone through two so far."

The House is expected to vote on a revised bill March 23, but it's currently unclear how that legislation will differ from the current document.

If the bill passes next week, it will advance with no support from Democrats, something Gohmert said he's OK with.

"I would love it if Democrats recognized that Obamacare was a problem and it caused them the loss of a majority and it caused them losses in statehouses all over the place. I would love for them to recognize that so we could repeal it in a bipartisan manner," Gohmert told TheBlaze.

"It seems to be a matter of pride. 'Gee, we passed it without any of your votes.'  So if it takes repealing it with all Republican votes, that is fine," he said. "But then I think you will see a much more open process — we certainly better — as we try to reform health care and get it back to a healthy way to treat people again."

Michael Cannon, director of health policy studies at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank in Washington, D.C., explained to TheBlaze that having bipartisan support on health care legislation would mostly produce negative outcomes. Cannon said that if there is bipartisan support among Republicans and Democrats, the bill "will look more like Obamacare" than whichever bill Republicans might have passed on their own.

"And while you may then have a bipartisan coalition support certain parts of Obamacare, and that would tend to give those changes more political durability, you'll also have to ask, are they good changes? Would they actually deliver stability in the market so that insurance companies are not afraid of entering the market?" Cannon asked.

Humana health insurance company announced it will withdraw from the Obamacare exchanges altogether. Another major insurer, Aetna, recently announced plans to withdraw from all but four state exchanges. Both companies cited multimillion dollar losses as their reasons for doing so. Aetna CEO Mark Bertolini said he expects other major health insurers will follow suit, possibly leaving some areas of the country with no insurers participating in the Obamacare exchange.

"It's not going to get any better; it's getting worse," Bertolini said last month.

Aetna's top executive went on to seemingly advocate for Obamacare's repeal. "The repeal is easy. They can do that tomorrow if they want to," he said.

"The question is what does the replacement look like and how long does it take to get there," Bertolini added.