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## ‘Obamacare Lite,’ ‘RINOcare’: Conservatives rebel against GOP’s ACA bill

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Conservative pressure groups and policy analysts, who’ve called for a full repeal of the Affordable Care Act, have judged the American Health Care Act — and found it badly wanting. Since the House GOP’s replacement plan was revealed Monday night, they’ve issued blistering statements, ticking off the ways they believe the party failed them.

“The House Republican proposal released last night not only accepts the flawed progressive premises of Obamacare but expands upon them,” said Michael Needham, the president of Heritage Action for America, which has lobbied for repeal since its founding. “Ronald Reagan once said, ‘Government’s view of the economy could be summed up in a few short phrases: If it moves, tax it. If it keeps moving, regulate it. And if it stops moving, subsidize it.’ The AHCA does all three.”

FreedomWorks, the tea party group that’s planning a March 15 “day of action” on the ACA, condemned the bill as “Obamacare-lite” and reiterated its support for a replacement bill introduced by Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) and backed by the House Freedom Caucus.

“It creates a new entitlement through the refundable tax credits,” FreedomWorks policy analyst Jason Pye said in a statement. “It allows insurance companies to assess a 30 percent penalty on those who don’t keep continuous coverage for 63 days, which is an individual mandate by another name.”

“Obamacare-lite” is the pejorative way that Paul has described the GOP’s bill, language he used even before the text was made public. At the Conservative Review, a site edited by the influential radio host and author Mark Levin, the bill has been dubbed “RINOcare,” incorporating an acronym for Republican in name only.

The conservative objection to the law has come not just on policy grounds, but on questions of political strategy. Michael Cannon, an influential analyst at the libertarian Cato Institute who helped Republicans slow down the expansion of the ACA in red states, wrote Tuesday morning that the AHCA would yoke the party to a weaker version of the ACA that was designed to fail.

“Flubbing ObamaCare would at once united and embolden Democrats while dividing the GOP base, driving the former to the polls in 2018 and 2020 while causing the latter to stay home,” Cannon said. “If ObamaCare is not doing well, and Republicans take the blame, it will create the potential for the sort of wave election Democrats experienced in 2008, when they captured not just the House and the presidency, but a filibuster-proof, 60-vote supermajority in the Senate. If that happens, and ObamaCare is not doing well, Democrats will be less interested in rescuing ObamaCare than repealing and replacing it themselves—with a single-payer system.”

Rep. Jim Jordan (R-Ohio), an influential member of the House Freedom Caucus, warned in an interview that the design of the AHCA would amount to “subsidies for unaffordable health care, subsidies for unaffordable premiums” — not just policies that Republicans had opposed, but policies voters would reject. And Heritage Action’s Needham warned that passage of the AHCA would alienate voters who thought Republicans were going to fix the health-care system.

“Many Americans seeking health insurance on the individual market will notice no significant difference between the Affordable Care Act (i.e., Obamacare) and the American Health Care Act,” Needham said. “That is bad politics and, more importantly, bad policy.”