



ObamaCare repeal effort hits snag on far right

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October 20, 2015

A far-right conservative group is muddying the waters for a major GOP-led bill that would do the most damage to ObamaCare since the law was first passed.

Heritage Action for America is running a campaign this week against a House bill that would repeal major pillars of ObamaCare through a budget tool called reconciliation, pressing GOP leaders to broaden their bill into a full repeal.

“What we’ve found over the past almost 24 hours now, there’s frustration with the path that leadership’s taking,” Heritage Action Foundation spokesman Dan Holler said Tuesday, one day after the group announced it would punish Republicans who voted in favor of reconciliation.

The House’s reconciliation bill would repeal the individual mandate, the employer mandate and unpopular taxes like the so-called “Cadillac” tax. It is slated for a vote Friday, before heading to the Senate for final approval by the chamber’s parliamentarian.

While Obama has vowed to block any bill chipping away at his signature legislative achievement, it would give Republicans the small political victory of saying that Congress passed a repeal of ObamaCare. Under the rules of reconciliation, a bill can reach the president’s desk with just a majority in the Senate, instead of the 60-vote threshold.

The House bill does not repeal every piece of the law because — as GOP leaders like Budget Committee Chairman Tom Price (R-Ga.) point out — a reconciliation bill must specifically target budget-related provisions to fit the Senate’s strict rules. Not all pieces of the healthcare law are directly budget-related, such as the hundreds of pages of insurance regulations.

Price acknowledged the limits of reconciliation in a statement Thursday. He praised the bill for repealing “major pillars of Obamacare that are both directly responsible for the coercive nature of this law and within the scope of the reconciliation process.”

But Holler, as well as conservative thinkers from the CATO Institute, argue a different interpretation of the Senate's rules.

"We feel really comfortable with making the argument that you can do full repeal," Holler said. "We feel pretty good that members are going to be receptive to what we're saying over the next 47 hours or so until they meet."

It's unclear whether the threats from Heritage Action will be enough to drive Republicans to vote against the bill.

Holler declined to say how many conservatives have agreed to vote against the reconciliation bill, but if the group wins the backing of the 40-member House Freedom Caucus, it could sink the bill.

The group's concerns with reconciliation are surfacing at a politically perilous time for the House GOP, which is still trying to choose its next Speaker.

In the Senate, even the most ardent ObamaCare foe won't say whether he'll support the House version of the reconciliation bill.

"We'll have to see what actually passes the House, and I'll assess any legislation that does pass the House," Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) told The Hill.

"My view has consistently been that we should repeal every word of ObamaCare, and we should use every procedural and legislative tool to do so," the 2016 presidential candidate added.

Sen. John Barrasso (R-Wyo.), another strong ObamaCare opponent, said the Senate would look carefully at the House bill to see what would hold water under the upper chamber's strict rules.

"Reconciliation rules allow for certain things to be done, other things not to be done. Consistent with the rules, we want to repeal as much as possible," Barrasso said Tuesday.

"I want to repeal and replace the whole thing; reconciliation is one thing to be able to claw away at the damaging parts of the healthcare law, but we need a Republican president to fully repeal this law," he added.