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Why one Republican legislator is dropping out of Congress' health plan

By [Sarah Kliff](#), Published: August 28

I asked Rep. Robert Pittenger (R-N.C.) to ask about his decision to drop out of Congress's health plan, where he plans to shop for health coverage and his thoughts on defunding Obamacare. What follows is a transcript of our discussion, lightly edited for clarity.

Sarah Kliff: Tell me why you decided to drop out of the Congressional health insurance plan.

Robert Pittenger: I've decided that during this open enrollment period I'm going to remove myself from the congressional health plan and decline the special subsidy that the president has decided on. I will purchase it without the aid of federal dollars. I think what the president is doing is not in accordance with the law [in allowing an employer contribution by Congress]. The president is ruling by decree.

I think this is about fairness. Congress shouldn't be exempted from the full impact of Obamacare.

SK: Where do you plan to purchase health insurance? Will you shop on the new Obamacare marketplaces?

RP: I'll look at all the options. I don't know what the options are. I'll see what's most affordable and what is the best plan that I can find.

SK: Have you shopped for health insurance before?

RP: I did for my former company, where we had a health insurance plan that had health savings accounts. My wife has a plan that I've been on in the past. I was on

the state plan, so I've shopped for it before. I can't buy into my former company's health savings account because I'm not part of the company anymore.

SK: Some would make the case that not much has changed about the Congressional health plan, that you've gotten a contribution from the federal government, your employer, before Obamacare. So why is there a problem with accepting it at this point?

RP: Under our current plan, we've been under the law. Next year the subsidy is outside the law. I'm not okay with that, so I'm going to purchase the best course I can to buy cost-effectively. I'll work within the appropriate framework. It's a matter of principle.

SK: You're back in your district right now, hosting a number of events. What are you hearing from your constituents about Obamacare?

RP: They're incensed. They're absolutely incensed. They recognize the enormous burden, the cost, the impact on business, that people are not hiring. If they're hiring they're keeping it under 30 hours. We've lost 240,000 full time jobs. BCBS said premiums would go up 284 percent. They're enraged.

SK: Do you support defunding Obamacare as part of any continuing resolution or debt limit deal?

RP: I don't think it's a logical approach, politically. I think it will die in the Senate, Obamacare will stay intact and we'll have to explain to our veterans why they're not getting their paycheck. We have armed forces in Afghanistan right now. I don't think we should tell our families that we're playing politics with their paychecks.

SK: Will you help your constituents enroll in Obamacare?

RP: Yes. I hosted a meeting down here that had an individual from the AARP as well as the Cato Institute. Over 400 business owners came out at Central Piedmont Community College. It was a big three-hour meeting, explaining to them how to engage in Obamacare. It has to be processed as it is.

My office will do everything it can to help people process through these landmines. People don't understand it. That's one of the reasons that Mr. Obama extended the employer mandate. People are very scared.