

Richmond Times-Dispatch

CBO report sets Ryancare plan back even further

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Three of Virginia's GOP congressmen have expressed opposition to or skepticism about the House leadership's plan to replace Obamacare — and the other four are uncommitted. Not an auspicious start for the bill.

Although Republicans spoke for years of health care reform, they did not grow serious until Obamacare's enactment. Republicans talked more than they acted in large part because social welfare seldom tops their agendas. Conservative purists opposed Medicare but put forward few alternatives of their own. They denounced most government programs as socialism, although during the Obamacare debate they claimed to be defending Medicare's integrity. Citizens aware of the background likely have more confidence in the Democratic commitment to the cause.

President Obama assured Americans that people who liked their coverage would not lose it. Reality proved him wrong and undermined support for his signature effort. Cynics remember that in crucial respects Obamacare echoed conservative alternatives to the Clintoncare (or Hillarycare) pursued two decades before. Obamacare fell far short of a single-payer system. It also got off to a dreadful start that almost cost Democrat Terry McAuliffe the 2013 Virginia gubernatorial election against a weak Republican.

During the 2016 campaign, Donald Trump missed few opportunities to criticize Obamacare. He also implicitly embraced a substantial government role in health. Despite its hold on the White House and its congressional majorities, the GOP must act soon. Repeal and reform must occur before Obamacare becomes an American institution.

The Congressional Budget Office's report on the House GOP leadership's American Health Care Act threatens momentum further. The CBO predicts the AHCA would make millions lose their

health coverage. It would not seriously reduce spending, either. The CBO's conclusions reinforce claims made by critics on the right as well as those on the left. Nancy Pelosi cites the CBO when she says the GOP would leave millions without coverage. A release from the libertarian Cato Institute denounced the GOP package as Obamacare-lite and said the CBO analysis suggests full repeal of Obamacare would cover more people than the lite version. The Times-Dispatch sees validity in Pelosi's complaint and in Cato's arguments. We traditionally have touted market-based solutions.

Virginia Republican Rep. Rob Wittman (R-1st) takes a nuanced view that illustrates the political predicament. He opposes the House leadership because AHCA would cause millions to lose their insurance while not cutting costs. Our concern is that an unreformed Obamacare would collapse and a single-payer contraption would rise from the ruins.