



Outsiders vs. Insiders: Obamacare repeal is ‘Shawshank Redemption’ moment for GOP

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Another week, another failure for the Republican congressional leadership.

The media is ablaze with stories of more feckless incompetence by the GOP congressional majority to pass any kind of repeal and/or replace of Obamacare this week. Of course the professional talkers are snickering at President Trump as well, seemingly joyous that the president doesn't appear to carry sufficient political clout to lean on enough senators to get anything pushed through.

Though it's safe to say all conservatives are frustrated with the lack of progress on Capitol Hill it's doubtful Trump himself will sustain any political hits from the inactions of a wayward few in his own party.

Jason L. Riley wrote at *The Wall Street Journal*, “Emily Ekins, a Cato Institute scholar who is part of a politically diverse team of academics and pollsters in the process of analyzing the 2016 election, told me on Monday that Trump supporters are less concerned about his policy agenda and more interested in having someone who understands them occupy the Oval Office...”

“This is of little comfort to Republicans in Congress. Unlike the president, GOP lawmakers must face voters next year and desperately want some legislative victories to campaign on. For them, a president this far underwater in national polls is cause for concern, given that the party in control of the White House usually drops seats in midterm elections. What the president's fans and foes alike want to see is economic growth and job creation, and a Bloomberg poll released Monday showed that a plurality of voters approve of Mr. Trump's performance in both categories. For now, Mr. Trump can count on his base. The bigger question might be how long he can count on his caucus.”

If the recent performance of his congressional brethren is any indication Trump can't count on them much at all. A few months ago when the first House Obamacare repeal effort failed people blamed the Freedom Caucus and conservatives for “stonewalling” and holding out for a better deal.

But now that conservatives in the House and Senate have reluctantly given their blessing to the Obamacare overhaul effort the onus of blameworthiness has shifted to the “moderate” Republicans, namely Senators Lisa Murkowski (Alaska), Shelley Moore Capito (West Virginia), Rob Portman (Ohio) and Susan Collins (Maine).

These are the faces of the new anti-Trump “opposition” having replaced the politically castrated Chuck Schumer who already took himself completely out of the process by strong-arming his entire Democrat conference into opposing *everything* the Republicans do. The liberal media still loves Schumer but I’m guessing nobody else gives a hoot what he does or says these days.

It could be said Trump has the easy role in all of this, and it’s one area where all presidents enjoy some political luxury in being able to cheer from a distance for their party congressional delegations to cross the legislative goal-line yet hardly risk anything in terms of their own future electoral prospects.

Going back to last year’s presidential campaign, Trump promised time and again to rid the country of the disastrous and failed Obamacare knowing full well there was nothing he could do of his own volition (other than perhaps issue some executive orders and to direct his future Health and Human Services Secretary to gum up the process) to ditch the Affordable Care Act.

Now that he’s president Trump can sit back, announce he’ll sign just about anything the Republican Congress conjures up that portends to repeal Obamacare and all the while figure whatever disastrous effects stem from the fallout of the action will rest solely on the narrow shoulders of Congress alone. Ever mindful of the polls, Trump grasps Congress’s approval rating is decidedly lower even than his and the American people aren’t stupid – at least the ones who follow politics closely.

If the House and Senate GOP leaders fail to produce something the full weight of the grassroots’ angst will come crushing down on them and their members, not on Trump. In spite of everything, by all appearances Trump negotiated the best “deal” he could get and was practically begging those on Capitol Hill to send him a piece of paper to apply some ink.

Therefore, no condemnation will come Trump’s way in this matter – but those impotent “moderate” members who are willing to sabotage the whole thing had better beware. They’re being exposed for all to see and as the faux Biblical saying on the wall (in the movie “Shawshank Redemption”) indicates, *“His judgment cometh and that right soon.”*

Bill Clinton was a master at this avoidance-of- reproach concept, pretending often to be against whatever the Newt Gingrich-led Congress passed but yet reluctantly still signed the bills into law, all the while complaining that he was hamstrung by his constitutional duties to govern the country.

Clinton even vetoed welfare reform *twice* under the guise of “mend it, don’t end it,” yet in the bill’s final stages acknowledged it would be better for him to save his own political rear-end and go along with a popular (except with his congressional Democrats) concept and allow changes to be made to the federal public assistance system.

Of course when the law performed as intended -- helping people get off of welfare and demanding that they find work -- big bubba Bill took all the credit for its success.

Trump can do likewise, though in his case there’s a good argument to be made that such reforms could not take place but for his presence in the Oval Office. Everyone knows if Barack Obama were still there nothing – on Obamacare or anything else -- would get done.

Trump’s governing style is undoubtedly taking shape; he’s clearly content to use the bully pulpit to advocate action and to foist culpability on those in Congress who fail to deliver it.

Still there are dissatisfied faultfinders who claim Trump’s supporters are granting him way too much leeway on his non-traditional behavior. Ben Shapiro wrote at National Review on Wednesday, “That’s not to say that Trump might not end up fulfilling some of [his] promises. I hope and pray he does. But it’s clear that the vast majority of Republicans no longer *care* if he does, so long as he does one thing: keep tweeting about the fake-news media. Were Trump to fulfill every conservative pledge but stop tweeting about Mika Brzezinski’s face and CNN’s ratings, many Republicans would be less enamored of him.

“Trump’s visceral rage is what thrills Republicans, not his policy — and a huge number of Republicans aren’t even interested in whether the rage undercuts his policy. If Mike Pence replaced Donald Trump and implemented every jot and tittle of the conservative program, then won reelection, most Republicans would be *enraged*, not excited.”

With all due respect to Shapiro, his assertion is nonsense. Of course he was and still remains a stalwart #NeverTrumper, a respected conservative commentator who continues to pen valid material yet can’t seem to get off of his fixation with Trump’s unorthodox White House behavior.

In this sense Shapiro is like everyone else in the #NeverTrump genre. Trump’s critics depict him as the lead character in a poorly made, formulaic fish-out-of-water comedy; you know, the kind that stars A-list talent and costs millions to make yet is ultimately destroyed by critics and goes down in history as a joke that wasn’t funny (something like Ishtar or Howard the Duck).

Trump himself hasn’t changed his “act” any, yet the Trump-haters have kept up their sniping at everything he does. They chastise Trump for the Republican Party’s lack of legislative accomplishments, claim the recent Donald Trump Jr. episode proves his campaign *wanted* to collude with the Russians and seemingly grant the establishment media a pass on its outrageous behavior as long as their digs at Trump contain some connection to a plausible conspiracy

theory.

It won't make a difference to Trump's backers. As Riley's *WSJ* article indicated above, most of the people who voted for Trump last November are still onboard with his presidency. They're willing to see how things play out in Congress before passing judgement on a man who promised to come to Washington to do things differently.

Thus far Trump has done well in fulfilling the spirit of his candidacy and his supporters rest easy with the knowledge he'll work tirelessly to Make America Great Again. Whether Congress allows him to get far in that quest is another matter. It's up to Paul Ryan and Mitch McConnell – and it could very well be their last chance to save themselves.