

House repeal of Obama's health care law is only the beginning

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House Majority Leader Eric Cantor of Va., center, speaks during a news conference on Capitol Hill in Washington, Wednesday, Jan. 19, 2011, to discuss the upcoming vote to repeal the health care bill. From left are, Rep. Nan Hayworth, R-N.Y., Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., Cantor, House Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy of Calif. and Rep. Jeb Hensarling R-Texas. (Alex Brandon/AP)

House Republicans on Wednesday took the first step to keep their pledge to undo the nation's health care reform law, passing a bill to repeal the measure even as they gear up to create a replacement.

The GOP's new House majority assured easy passage of their repeal measure on 245-189 vote Wednesday that split largely along party lines. But the long-term prospects of actually undoing the new law are far less certain.

With the Democrat-led Senate unlikely to act on the bill, a complete repeal is unlikely.

Instead, Republicans will attempt to dismantle President Barack Obama's health care reforms piecemeal by depriving them of the funding needed to enact the law's hundreds of new policies and provisions over the next year or two.

Republicans will have an opportunity to strip that funding through the appropriations process later this year.

³You can throw enough sand in the gears to slow things down so things aren't locked into place,² said Michael Tanner, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank.

³Obama wants to get things locked into place, so you can't repeal it. Republicans are trying to slow everything down so that doesn't happen.² Several provisions of the health

care reform law have already been implemented, including a ban on lifetime benefit limits set by insurance companies, new protections for people with pre-existing conditions and a provision to allow adults up to age 26 to remain on their parents' insurance policies.

Democrats argued that repealing the bill would end these new policies, which many people have come to rely upon.

³Over and over today I've heard supporters of this bill saying it's just the first step, then maybe they will think about fixing the bill,² Rep. Diana DeGette, D-Colo., said of the GOP repeal bill. ³Well, tell that to the millions of Americans who are now reaping the benefits of the legislation, who, if this [repeal] actually becomes law, would lose what they have only now just gained.²

Republicans on Thursday will introduce a resolution ordering the various House committees to devise a new reform plan, but set no deadline for those committees. When asked how long the GOP would wait before moving to replace the current health care law, Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, told reporters, ³I don't know that we need artificial deadlines set up for the committees to act.² Republicans say they are considering measures that would address separate health care issues, like pre-existing conditions and adult children who want to remain on their parents' plans. They are also planning to put forward their own solutions, such as allowing interstate insurance competition.

Rep. Phil Gingrey, R-Ga., a physician, told The Washington Examiner he plans to introduce a bill as early as this week that would implement tort reforms for medical cases similar to a decades-old measure in California that limits damages and attorney's fees that can be collected, shortens the statute of limitations and provides for binding arbitration.

Gingrey said Republicans will also move to alter Obama's plan to give states the flexibility to adjust eligibility levels, premiums or enrollment fees for Medicare and Medicaid recipients.

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