



Dem candidates and the ObamaCare albatross

By Mike Tanner
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Faced with the continuing unpopularity of the Affordable Care Act, aka Obamacare, Democrats across the country appear to have settled on a new mantra: Don't repeal it, fix it. Unfortunately, saying you want to fix Obamacare appears to be easier than actually fixing it.

Of course, everyone wants a better website. Even the Political Action Committee associated with Nancy Pelosi has been running ads for Democratic candidates that criticizes "the disastrous healthcare website." But other than better computer programming, one wonders what Democrats would actually do.

Polls show the narrow line that Democratic candidates must walk. Some individual elements of the law, such as the ban on denying coverage for preexisting conditions and allowing children to stay on their parents policies until age 26 are well liked, but overall the legislation remains remarkably unpopular. According to the RealClearPolitics average of polls, voters oppose the law by a margin of 52 to 39 percent. Still, Democrats take heart from polls that show the public favors "fixing" the law, rather than "repealing" it outright.

Thus you find Alex Sink, the Democratic candidate in the March 11 special election for Florida's bellwether 26th Congressional District, saying of the health care law, "It's not perfect, so let's fix it." But trying to track down exactly *how* she would fix it is a bit more elusive. Sink's website says only that she wants to "Keep the good, get rid of the bad."

I guess that answers that.

The same purposeful vagueness can be found in Kentucky where Allison Lundgren Grimes, who is seeking to oust Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), allows that she is "concerned with some aspects of health reform." Beyond her "concern," the only fix she offers is to delay the employer mandate for a year. That's a pretty risk-free position since President Obama has already delayed it for longer than that.

Sen. Mark Pryor (D-Ark.), considered by many observers to be the most endangered Democratic Senate incumbent, has been aggressive about challenging Republicans for their lack of ideas about how to replace the Affordable Care Act. He recently challenged his opponent to "put your

money where your mouth is....You're identifying all these things, let's go ahead and try to fix them." Yet, neither Pryor's Senate page nor his campaign page even mentions the Affordable Care Act, let alone offers any proposal to fix it.

Meanwhile, another at-risk red state Democrat, North Carolina Sen. Kay Hagen, reminded voters that "I've always said that this law would require fixes." Putting aside the fact that anything she said while the law was being passed must have been whispered so softly that no record of it can be detected, the question remains about what fixes she supports now. Her website, unsurprisingly, has no section on Obamacare, and does not have anything on proposals to fix its problems.

To be fair, Pryor and Hagen, along with embattled Democrats like Sens. Mary Landrieu of Louisiana and Mark Begich of Alaska, have sponsored legislation that would allow people to keep their current insurance, even if it does not meet all of Obamacare's requirements. The legislation would go beyond the temporary reprieve that President Obama granted last fall. However, they have done nothing yet to pressure Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid to bring the measure to a vote.

Similarly, several Democrats, including Hagen, have cosponsored legislation to repeal a tax on medical devices that helps fund Obamacare. That legislation too has never come to a vote. And, while House Democrats can blame their minority status for failing to advance legislation, Democratic senators could join with Republicans to force a vote. So far, they have not done so.

Beyond those two measures, well, it's mostly the sound of crickets.

Republicans have been rightly chided for failing to put much meat on the bones of their call to "repeal and replace" Obamacare. Shouldn't those Democrats offering to fix the health care law be held to the same standard?

Tanner is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute.