



Rand Paul can save health care reform

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As if politics isn't enough of a circus, the elephants and donkeys of Washington were literally running around Capitol Hill last week trying to find the fabled GOP Obamacare replacement bill. Sen. Rand Paul started the hunt after being repeatedly denied information by his own party's leadership about major health care overhaul.

Paul himself had proposed a replacement bill of his own in January. Rare's Jack Hunter summarized the plan as including:

- *A tax credit of up to \$5,000 per individual that could be used as part of a Health Savings Account*
- *Eliminates minimum standards that health insurance companies had to meet under Obamacare, which would open the door for more affordable, yet less comprehensive plans*
- *Would allow insurance companies to sell plans across state lines*
- *A two-year window for those with pre-existing conditions to get healthcare, after which those with such conditions could still get coverage in group plans*

Although no plan is perfect as health care is a very complicated business, Paul's plan received cheers from many market-oriented health care analysts. Michael Tanner of the Cato Institute praised the plan in National Review as "offer[ing] Republicans the best road map they can find out of the wilderness they have been wandering in."

Apparently this praise was not enough to catch the attention of Republican leadership, who have instead decided to draft a plan of their own in the shadows. The fact that one of the few

Republican politicians brave enough to propose a replacement bill is deliberately being left in the dark is downright shameful.

What's worse is that leaked copies of the GOP's secret plan suggests that leadership-endorsed replacement will do little to inject choice and competition into the health care industry, instead only slightly tweaking Obamacare's main tenants.

As Paul explained on CNN:

What we think is being hidden from conservatives is there's a lot of 'Obamacare Lite' in their bill. There's a new entitlement program that will increase at about 5 percent per year forever. There is also a Cadillac tax or something similar to the Cadillac tax that was in Obamacare. And there's also an individual mandate, believe it or not. Instead of paying the mandate to the government, they're going to tell you you have to pay the mandate, by law, to an insurance company.

The devil is truly in the details. Not only does the GOP leadership plan keep in place many of the same subsidies and regulations as Obamacare, but less people will have access to affordable insurance.

To give just one example, the GOP leadership plan replaces Obamacare's means-tested tax credits to tax credits based on age and not income. As a result, "millions of highly vulnerable people—those near the poverty line and those with poor health status—will not receive enough in tax credits to afford the coverage they need" according to Forbes' Avik Roy, a leading conservative health care analyst.

As I wrote last month, the inconvenient truth is that the only way to truly make health care affordable is to eliminate many of the popular aspects of Obamacare such as the individual mandate and coverage for preexisting conditions. GOP leadership does not seem willing to make the tough choices. As a result, any Frankenstein plan they concoct will simply resurrect the worst aspects of Obamacare.

Fortunately, hope for true market reform in health care is not dead. As Rare's Jack Hunter explained last week, Rand Paul is in a position of power at the moment:

Paul has the support of the 40 vote bloc House Freedom Caucus, and Senators Mike Lee and Ted Cruz vowed last week to oppose any proposal that did not meet the bare minimum of the Obamacare repeal passed in 2015.

Paul, Lee and Cruz alone could potentially block any Obamacare proposal passed by the House if it does not meet their standards. "Republicans would likely need 50 of the 52 GOP senators to vote for a repeal-and-replace bill, so the trio could sink any proposal they dislike," Politico noted Monday.

Conservative members of Congress must muster the strength to stand up with Paul and their colleagues in insisting on true market reform in health care — or at least a discussion about it. The current circus of backroom deals and running around the halls of Capitol Hill is of no benefit to the GOP's popularity and the American people's health.

