

The Daily Record

Graham-Cassidy Offers Too Little Improvement

Michael D. Tanner

Yogi Berra was right: It's déjà vu all over again.

Health-care reform is back on the table. With time rapidly running out — the reconciliation rule that would allow legislation to pass with just 50 Senate votes expires Friday — Republicans may take up yet another proposal to “repeal and replace” Obamacare.

The legislation, proposed by Sen. Bill Cassidy, R-La., and Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., is less ambitious than previous repeal efforts. Essentially, Graham-Cassidy would fold all current Obamacare funding into a single block grant to each state. Keeping this money flowing means that Graham-Cassidy must keep most Obamacare taxes in place. Only the individual and employer mandates and the medical-device tax are repealed. This has led Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., to warn that the bill simply “rearranges the furniture a bit, changes some names, and otherwise masks what is really going on — a redistribution of Obamacare taxes and a new Republican entitlement program, funded nearly as extravagantly as Obamacare.”

The bill would shift money from some high-cost states, such as California, Massachusetts, and New York, to more rural states.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the aisle, Bernie Sanders has introduced his latest version of “Medicare for All” that would cost ... \$1.4 trillion per year. That would be more than a third of our entire current federal budget.

And when Bernie says single payer, he means it. His plan would outlaw private insurance. If you don't like what the government gives you, tough!

The contrast here is not just between rival healthcare plans. Ever since 1945, when Harry Truman first proposed a national government-run healthcare system, progressives have known what they want. From Medicare and Medicaid through the Children's Health Insurance Program and the Affordable Care Act, they have advanced steadily, if incrementally, toward that goal.

Bernie's plan is the latest step in that long march toward government health care. It is not going to pass anytime soon. But the fact that it is co-sponsored by 17 senators and supported by nearly every rumored Democratic candidate for the 2020 presidential nomination shows the degree to which Democrats are united around a common goal. We can disagree with what they seek, but at least we know what it is.

And, Republicans? They want a bill that will pass.

In the battle of ideas over health-care reform, Republicans have unilaterally disarmed. When was the last time Republicans explained what a freemarket health-care system would look like, how it would work, and why it would be better for healthcare consumers? The old adage is true: You can't beat something with nothing.

That's why Republicans are once again trying to eke out a narrow win on a bill that slows but doesn't reverse the ongoing march to socialized medicine.

Michael Tanner is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute and the author of [Going for Broke: Deficits, Debt, and the Entitlement Crisis](#). A longer version of this article appeared in [National Review \(Online\)](#).