



GOP faces unity test on ObamaCare bill

By: Molly K. Hooper – April 23, 2013

House Republican leaders face a major test on a controversial healthcare bill that is strongly opposed by a powerful right-leaning group.

As of press time, House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.) was moving ahead for the House to vote Wednesday on legislation that would move billions from a “prevention” fund in ObamaCare to one for high-risk insurance pools of people with pre-existing conditions.

The Club for Growth has denounced the bill, saying it will key-vote the roll call. Democrats in the House also oppose the legislation that would revamp President Obama’s healthcare reform law, forcing the GOP pass the bill on its own. It remains unclear whether leaders will have votes to pass the Helping Sick Americans Now Act.

The bill’s challenging path to passage has once again raised a question that divides the GOP: Should Republicans look to completely repeal ObamaCare, or reshape it? Some Republicans note that any effort to repeal the law will die in the Senate and draw a veto threat. Others maintain the GOP should not get any of its fingerprints on the law.

House Republicans have struggled to pass high-profile bills without support from Democrats. Earlier this year, Democrats were needed to pass both the “fiscal cliff” and Hurricane Sandy relief bills.

Yet, despite having a smaller majority after the 2012 election, House Republicans last month were able to pass a budget resolution without a single Democratic vote.

The healthcare bill was approved in the Energy and Commerce Committee on a party-line vote last week. Co-sponsors include Republican leaders such as Rules Committee Chairman Pete Sessions (Texas) and National Republican Congressional Committee Chairman Greg Walden (Ore.).

The GOP bill would extend enrollment in the Pre-Existing Conditions Insurance Plan (PCIP) through next year, when the Affordable Care Act’s major provisions will go into effect.

House Republicans have said high-risk pools should replace one of the healthcare law’s most popular provisions — the requirement that insurance companies cover people with pre-existing conditions.

Cantor has strongly defended the bill crafted by Rep. Joe Pitts (R-Pa.), claiming it would help “America’s most vulnerable patients.”

He has blamed the Obama administration for “leaving thousands of Americans with pre-existing conditions without access to health insurance.”

House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) made it clear that Democrats would not help GOP leaders pass the measure.

“This is a continuing effort to undermine the Affordable Care Act in another way. It was reported out of committee on a totally partisan vote. No Democrat voted for it. You know, we have some pretty conservative Democrats on the committee and some Democrats that didn’t support the Affordable Care Act.

They think this is a bad way to go,” Hoyer told reporters on Tuesday.

Club for Growth Vice President Andy Roth has called the bill “a complete mess,” pointing out the vote will be included in the group’s scorecard.

“Don’t prop up an awful program run by Washington,” Roth stated in an email widely distributed on Capitol Hill. “Unfortunately, it’s distracting the GOP away from the real fight, which is full repeal of ObamaCare. Fiscal conservatives should recognize this — and consider whether that misdirection was part of House leadership’s intention all along.”

Less than an hour after Roth’s comments, Cantor spokesman Rory Cooper sent an email to reporters highlighting “lots of support for helping sick Americans with pre-existing conditions.”

Among the groups that have endorsed the bill are Americans for Tax Reform, FreedomWorks, the Cato Institute and Independent Women’s Voice.

The Rules Committee was set to consider the bill Tuesday late afternoon, but that was pushed back. A panel spokeswoman explained that the rescheduling was due to a briefing on the Boston attacks set for the same time Tuesday.

However, a source familiar with the situation told The Hill that leaders were using the extra time afforded during their 6:30 p.m. vote series to whip the bill.

The Club for Growth isn’t the only group opposed to the Pitts legislation. Conservative pundit and ForAmerica Chairman Brent Bozell labeled the bill “CantorCare.”

In a release, he said the GOP “must stop abandoning the promises they made to their supporters and get back to advancing the causes of freedom, prosperity and virtue.” Cantor’s office declined to respond to the criticism.