



Republicans, keep working to get health reforms right

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Successfully passing legislation can be extremely difficult. Just ask Republican senators in our nation's capital.

I happened to be in Washington, D.C. as the latest chapter of the health care saga was unfolding in our republic's upper chamber. After meeting with several elected officials in both the U.S. House and Senate on this trip, it is pretty clear to me that frustration is running high on Capitol Hill.

Since the passage of the Affordable Care Act, the GOP has campaigned on repeal. Republicans have controlled the House for years, but needed the Senate and the presidency to make good on their long-standing promise.

In 2016, the GOP got what it wanted. Although Republicans do not have the super majorities the Democrats did in order to pass the ACA, they still should have enough to get something through in theory.

What has played out for Republicans since the beginning of the year has been anything but easy. It took a couple tries in the House to get something passed. The most conservative wing of the party halted the original House plan. In the Senate, it is a mix of people putting up roadblocks.

Here is the GOP's problem: You have an ideological range from moderates to hardliners. It is difficult to find compromise among competing interests when you have a majority of merely a couple seats. If you lose three Republican senators without picking up any Democratic support, nothing advances.

For as much criticism as Sen. John McCain has received for his most recent votes on health care, he did the GOP a favor. The so-called "skinny repeal," which failed, is bad legislation. It would have only accelerated the demise of several aspects of the ACA.

It is clear the individual market of the ACA is in trouble. A number of insurance companies have pulled out, leaving the options slim for people required to have it. The lack of options has also led premiums to skyrocket. It reached such a point that the Minnesota Legislature passed a "reinsurance" bill.

If Republicans were to pass reform that makes only minor changes to the law, they could easily be blamed for any further issues with the ACA.

This positions Democrats pretty well. It is always easier to be opposed to something, or resist, than to pass legislation.

Personally, I am not a fan of the ACA. As a young person, I would much rather create a system that better utilizes Health Savings Accounts, allows competition across state lines, and imports cheaper drugs from outside the U.S. to increase competition.

There will never been a perfect system that fully meets the needs of everyone. That is a sad reality. We are a country of over 320 million people. Within that population there are unique health circumstances that will not be completely addressed.

Talk of a single-payer health care system has picked up steam with Sen. Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign. The argument being used to justify a switch to this system basically amounts to "but everyone else is doing it."

Despite the romantic notion that everyone would have health care, differing levels of care would still exist. Those with financial means will purchase private insurance and pay for private-sector health care much like in Canada and the United Kingdom.

Given our government's handling of the Veterans Affairs system, I am not encouraged by the thought of single-payer.

Health care policy is really shaped by our beliefs. If you think it is a right, you will likely lean toward a single-payer or universal system.

But as Michael Tanner of the Cato Institute points out, health care is a commodity. It is finite. There are only so many doctors and hospitals, and only so much money. Governments are formed to protect rights, not grant them.

I believe the intentions of everyone within the health care debate are good. However, these conversations are not easy to have, much like passing actual policy. The GOP should take time to craft better legislation. It is important to get this right.