US Senate beats back Obama health law repeal bid

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President Barack Obama's Democratic allies in the US Senate defeated Wednesday a Republican push to repeal his landmark health care overhaul, likely leaving its fate in the hands of the courts.

Lawmakers voted 47-51 along party lines to allow the repeal drive to advance -- well short of the 60 votes necessary -- as the Obama administration geared up to fight judges' rulings declaring his signature overhaul unconstitutional.

Observers say challenges to the sweeping overhaul, one of the signal victories of Obama's first two years in office, will likely wind up before the US Supreme Court, the final arbiter of the US Constitution.

Senators also voted 81-17 to strip out a small tax paperwork requirement, a step Democrats portrayed as a symbol of their willingness to mend, but not end, the health care law.

"Democrats have said we are willing to compromise on common-sense fixes," said Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid. "But Democrats will not compromise if it means undoing the progress we've made toward fixing a broken system."

Republicans -- all 47 of whom voted to scrap the measure -- knew they could not prevail but aimed to force Democrats thought to be vulnerable in 2012 elections to take what could be a politically painful vote.

"This fight isn't over. We intend to continue the fight to repeal and replace Obamacare," said Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, using the derisive label his party has used to attack the law.

The law, which Obama signed in March after a year-long battle, aims to extend coverage to 31 million of the 36 million Americans who currently lack insurance.

It requires most Americans to buy insurance and offers subsidies for low-income families to do so, while forbidding insurers from denying coverage because of pre-existing medical conditions.

Recent polls have found the US public deeply divided over the law, but only about one in four favoring outright repeal.

Although the United States is the world's richest nation, it is the only industrialized democracy that does not provide health care coverage to all its citizens.

The Senate vote came after the Republican-held House of Representatives voted 245-189 to repeal the [health care](#) legislation and then moved to start crafting their party's version of the overhaul.

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