

US House votes to repeal health law, likely to fail in Senate

July 11 2012, by Michael Mathes

US lawmakers voted Wednesday to repeal President Barack Obama's health care law, a contentious election-year move by Republicans aimed at striking down one of Obama's key achievements.

The bill, which passed in a 244-185 vote, came as outraged Democrats accused Republicans of seeking to score political points.

But the legislation has virtually no chance of passing the Democratic-held Senate, and the White House has issued a veto threat should the legislation reach the president's desk.

Democrats have slammed the effort -- the 31st vote to restrict, defund or repeal parts or all of the Affordable Care Act -- as a brash political show, and acknowledged for days that the bill would pass the Republican-held House of Representatives.

"You're going to win the vote, but you're going to lose the case, and the debate," roared John Dingell, the dean of the House who has served in the chamber since 1955, shortly before the vote.

"I say shame. You're wasting the time of the American people," he said at the conclusion of more than five hours of debate during which lawmakers made their cases for or against the reforms signed into law in 2010 and upheld as constitutional by the Supreme Court last month.

Five Democrats, some in battleground states like North Carolina where

they face a tough reelection in November, joined all Republicans who voted for repeal.

Conservatives, led by Mitt Romney who is challenging Obama for the White House in the November election, have sought to repeal the law from day one, while most Democrats have praised it as bringing the world's richest nation closer than ever to universal health care for its citizens.

Republicans say it places unfair financial burdens on small businesses whose costs they say are rising under the law -- charges the White House refutes.

"Obamacare is a pile of broken promises," Republican National Committee chairman Reince Priebus said after the vote, citing his party's position that the law has led to rising insurance premiums and health care costs and loss of employer-based insurance for 20 million Americans.

House Majority Leader Eric Cantor essentially acknowledged the vote was a bid at political positioning.

Cantor brought the issue to the floor "so that we may all be on record following the Supreme Court's decision in order to show that the House rejects Obamacare, and that we are committed to taking this flawed law off the books."

Republicans are hoping a push for repeal can galvanize voters in November.

"Only by sending governor Romney to the White House and more Republicans to Washington can we finally end the devastating effects of Obama's government takeover of health care," Priebus said.

But Democrat John Larson took to the floor to vocalize what many critics of the repeal have already said: Republicans have not offered specifics for replacing the law.

"We continue to see no plan from the other side," Larson said.

"We can only surmise this: that you would rather see the president fail than the American people succeed."

With Romney insisting that the law's mandate that all Americans obtain health insurance or pay a fine amounts to a massive tax hike, the issue has morphed into a pivotal campaign battle front.

The latest repeal vote illustrates what Americans "loath about politics in Washington," White House spokesman Jay Carney told reporters.

"Casting these votes again and again and again... does nothing to improve the bottom line for middle-class families."

Democrats warn that repeal could see the reimposition of lifetime dollar caps on benefits and refusal to cover patients due to pre-existing conditions.

It would also mean an estimated 30 million low-income Americans would lose the health insurance guaranteed them under law, and three million young adults may be dropped from their parents' plans.

Romney got a taste Wednesday of how some US minority voters are reacting to his push to eliminate Obamacare when he addressed the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, America's largest civil rights group.

Attendees to the group's annual convention responded to Romney with

loud, sustained boos when he mentioned the repeal.

A recent poll showed the reforms have gained support recently, with Americans now evenly split.

The latest ABC News/Washington Post poll shows 47 percent of respondents say they support the Affordable Care Act, while 47 percent are opposed, a noticeable change since the companies' April survey in which 39 percent supported and 53 percent opposed the law.

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Citation: US House votes to repeal health law, likely to fail in Senate (2012, July 11) retrieved 17 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-07-house-votes-repeal-health-law.html>

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