

Republican health plan takes hit as forecast says 22 mn could lose coverage

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Credit: George Hodan/public domain

Senate Republicans struggling to boost support for their "Obamacare" repeal bill were dealt a damaging blow Monday with the release of a non-partisan report forecasting that the plan would leave 22 million more Americans uninsured by 2026.

The legislation introduced last week by Senate Majority Leader Mitch

McConnell was already in jeopardy, with support for the [health care plan](#) stalling within his own party despite expressions of optimism by President Donald Trump.

As Democrats have united in opposition to the draft, Republican leaders have struggled to rally enough support from within their ranks to get the [bill](#) over the line.

McConnell has said he wants to accomplish that by Friday, before a short July 4 recess for lawmakers, even though some in the party have balked at the short timeline.

The report by the Congressional Budget Office will no doubt sow deeper concerns about the viability of the legislation, which is aimed at fulfilling Trump's pledge to repeal the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare, the landmark reform of his Democratic predecessor Barack Obama.

"The Senate bill would increase the number of people who are uninsured by 22 million in 2026 relative to the number under current law," CBO said in its highly anticipated report.

The estimated increase in the number of uninsured under the bill that passed the House of Representatives last month was 23 million.

According to CBO, the Senate legislation would also slash federal spending by some \$321 billion over the 2017-2026 period, a net savings of \$202 billion over the House measure.

CBO said that the bill's abolition of the provision requiring individuals to have insurance would lead to 15 million more uninsured people next year alone.

It also warned that average premiums for benchmark plans for single individuals "would be about 20 percent higher in 2018 than under current law," mainly because the elimination of mandated coverage would prompt comparatively fewer healthy people to sign up.

The White House quickly dismissed the CBO report, citing what it called its "history of inaccuracy."

Republican holdouts

Five Senate Republicans publicly opposed the bill as drafted, even before the new CBO score.

Several more have expressed concerns, particularly with the way it slashes the expansion of Medicaid, America's public health program for the poor and disabled.

Thirty-one states have expanded Medicaid to include those whose income is up to 38 percent above the poverty level.

Despite potential roadblocks in the Senate, Trump said Monday that Republicans were working overtime to secure the necessary votes from within.

"Republican Senators are working very hard to get there, with no help from the Democrats. Not easy!" Trump tweeted.

Trump at the weekend spoke "extensively" with several Senate Republicans, including Ted Cruz, Rand Paul and Ron Johnson, the White House said, in a bid to gain skeptical lawmakers on board.

Republicans have introduced slight changes into the legislation, and Trump is "very pleased with the developments," spokesman Sean Spicer

told reporters.

The bill would create a new system of federal tax credits to assist people buying health insurance, while allowing states the ability to drop many benefits required under the ACA, such as maternity care and emergency services.

With Republicans enjoying a 52-48 majority in the Senate, McConnell can only afford to lose two defectors. In the event of a tie, Vice President Mike Pence would still give the Republicans a win.

'Insufficient and unworkable'

But misgivings about the measure have grown, particularly in states that expanded Medicaid. Senator Bill Cassidy, a Republican from Louisiana, said he is undecided about the bill.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer assailed the legislation, saying the CBO score confirms it is "every bit as mean as the House bill."

"Trumpcare will lead to higher costs and less care, and will lead to tens of millions of Americans without insurance," he added, and Republicans should read the CBO score "like a giant stop sign."

Voices of concern were heard outside Congress too. At least three Republican governors—in Arizona, Nevada and Ohio—are either opposed to the bill or want substantial changes made.

The bill drew criticism for its cap of overall [federal spending](#) on Medicaid, and its allotment of money to states on a per-beneficiary basis.

"The per capita cap growth rates for Medicaid in the Senate bill are

insufficient and unworkable," the bipartisan National Association of Medicaid Directors said in a statement Monday.

Several Republicans have spoken out about the secrecy of the Senate bill, and its aggressive timeline.

"There's no way we should be voting on this next week," Republican Senator Ron Johnson warned on NBC's "Meet the Press" Sunday.

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