

# Republicans make desperate bid to save health care bill

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In this Thursday, Aug. 17, 2017, file photo, U.S. Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, speaks to members of the media while attending an event in Lewiston, Maine. Collins said Sunday, Sept. 24, she finds it "very difficult" to envision backing the last-chance GOP bill repealing the Obama health care law. That likely opposition leaves the Republican drive to fulfill one of the party's premier campaign promises dangling by a thread. (AP Photo/Robert F. Bukaty, File)

Republican opposition to the GOP health care bill swelled to near-fatal numbers Sunday as Sen. Susan Collins all but closed the door on

supporting the last-ditch effort to scrap the Obama health care law and Sen. Ted Cruz said that "right now" he doesn't back it.

In a late bid to win votes and stave off defeat, Republicans were adding \$14.5 billion to the measure for states, according to documents obtained late Sunday by The Associated Press.

White House legislative liaison Marc Short and Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., one of the measure's sponsors, said Republicans would press ahead with a vote this week. But the comments by Collins and Cruz left the Republican drive to uproot President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act dangling by an increasingly fraying thread.

A vote must occur this week for Republicans to prevail with their narrow Senate majority. Next Sunday, protections expire against a Democratic filibuster, bill-killing delays that Republicans lack the votes to overcome.

President Donald Trump seemed to distance himself from the showdown, saying his "primary focus" was his party's drive to cut taxes.

"I don't know what they're doing," Trump told reporters about the bill's GOP opponents as he prepared to fly back to Washington after a weekend at his New Jersey golf club. "But you know what? Eventually we'll win, whether it's now or later."

Two GOP senators, Rand Paul of Kentucky and John McCain of Arizona, have already said they oppose the legislation. All Democrats will vote against it. "No" votes from three of the 52 GOP senators would kill the party's effort to deliver on its perennial vow to repeal "Obamacare" and would reprise the party's politically jarring failure to accomplish that this summer.

Collins cited the bill's cuts in the Medicaid program for low-income

people and the likelihood that it would result in many losing health coverage and paying higher premiums. The Maine moderate also criticized a provision letting states make it easier for insurers to raise premiums on people with pre-existing medical conditions.



In this Sept. 6, 2017, file photo, Senate Judiciary Committee member Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, speaks during the committee's hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington. Cruz said he's against the Republican bill that would erase much of President Barack Obama's health law. If the Texas Republican sticks to that stand, GOP leaders will have little hope that their 11th-hour Senate push will survive. (AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta, File)

"It's very difficult for me to envision a scenario where I would end up voting for this bill," said Collins.

The conservative Cruz also voiced opposition, underscoring the bill's

problems with both ends of the GOP spectrum.

"Right now, they don't have my vote," Cruz said at a festival in Austin, Texas. He suggested the measure doesn't do enough to reduce premiums by allowing insurers to sell less comprehensive coverage than Obama's law allows.

Cruz said he doesn't think fellow conservative Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, backs the GOP bill. Lee spokesman Conn Carroll said Lee wants "technical changes" but hasn't finalized his position.

A chart Republicans circulated Sunday said the legislation's grants would provide 14 percent more for Arizona than under Obama's law, 4 percent more for Kentucky 49 percent more for Texas and 3 percent more for Alaska, home to undecided GOP Sen. Lisa Murkowski, and Maine, home to Sen. Collins, would get 43 percent more." Some extra money is specifically directed at sparsely populated states.

The numbers are misleading, partly because they omit GOP Medicaid cuts from clamping per-person spending caps on the program, said Matt House, spokesman for Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y. In a statement, Schumer said the measure would "throw our health insurance system into chaos."

"We're moving forward and we'll see what happens next week," Graham said earlier Sunday.

Paul said even though the bill transforms federal [health care](#) dollars into block grants states would control, the GOP bill left too much of that spending intact.



In this Sept. 30, 2013, file photo, the morning sun illuminates the U.S. Capitol in Washington. Sen. John McCain's opposition to the GOP's last-ditch effort to repeal and replace the Obama health law has dealt a likely fatal blow to the legislation—and perhaps to the Republican Party's years of promises to kill the program. (AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite, file)

"Block granting Obamacare doesn't make it go away," Paul said.

McCain has complained that Republicans should have worked with Democrats in reshaping the country's \$3 trillion-a-year health care system and cited uncertainty over the bill's impact on consumers.

Murkowski has remained uncommitted, saying she's studying the bill's impact on Alaska. Her state's officials released a report Friday citing "unique challenges" and deep cuts the measure would impose on the state. She and Collins were the only Republicans who voted "no" on four pivotal votes on earlier versions of the GOP legislation in July.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., has said he intends to have a vote this week but has stopped short of firmly committing to it. The White House's Short said he expects a vote Wednesday.

The bill would repeal much of the 2010 law, including its tax penalties on people who don't buy insurance and on larger employers not offering coverage to workers. States could loosen coverage requirements under the law's mandates, including prohibiting insurers from charging seriously ill people higher premiums and letting them sell policies covering fewer services.

It would eliminate Obama's expansion of Medicaid and the subsidies the law provides millions of people to reduce their premiums and out of pocket costs, substituting block grants to states.

Collins was on CBS' "Face the Nation" and CNN's "State of the Union," Graham appeared on ABC's "This Week" and Paul was on NBC's "Meet the Press," and Short was on CBS, NBC and "Fox News Sunday."

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