Senate Republicans pull plug on latest Obamacare repeal bid

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US Senate Republicans abandoned their latest plan to dismantle Obamacare Tuesday when it became clear that President Donald Trump's party did not have the votes, assuring the 2010 health reforms survive for the foreseeable future.

Grim-faced lawmakers, who had hoped to hold the vote this week, made the announcement shortly after a Republican luncheon in which senators discussed the impasse, and possible future paths forward for their efforts to repeal and replace Barack Obama's landmark 2010 health care reforms.

"We've made the decision that since we don't have the votes we will postpone that vote," Senator Bill Cassidy, one of the bill's main authors, told reporters.

Republicans had scrambled to pass health care reform before a September 30 deadline, using special rules that would have allowed them to avoid a Democratic filibuster and pass the bill with a simple majority.

Republicans, who hold 52 seats in the 100-member chamber, could afford just two defectors. But three, including most recently Senator Susan Collins, have declared their opposition.

"Am I disappointed? Absolutely," Cassidy said.

The collapse, yet again, of an effort to fulfill one of Trump's primary

campaign pledges is sure to be an embarrassment to the White House, which has seen several Obamacare repeal and replace bills crash and burn this year.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said the party, still searching for a first major legislative victory under the Trump administration, will now turn to another Trump priority.

"Where we go from here is tax reform," he said.

Despite the latest collapse, Senator Lindsey Graham insisted the effort to sink Obamacare—and fulfill a seven-year Republican promise—was alive and kicking.

"We're coming back to this after taxes," Graham said. "There's plenty of fight left in us."

But Democrats immediately claimed victory, with Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer saying that with the failure of the Graham-Cassidy bill, "the health care of millions has been protected and preserved."

The Republican plan had aimed to replace the Affordable Care Act with a system of block grants to states.

It would make sweeping changes and cuts to Medicaid, with experts projecting a staggering $1 trillion plus in cuts between 2020 and 2036 to the federal health program for the poor and the disabled, which has been expanded under Obamacare.

Compounding the problem for the bill, the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office released a preliminary analysis of the new legislation Monday, and projected that it would leave "millions fewer people" with comprehensive health insurance.

Restarting bipartisan talks?

With the latest repeal failure, Democrats swiftly said they wanted to restart stalled bipartisan talks aimed at boosting the existing health care system.

"GrahamCassidy is officially dead," Senator Martin Heinrich tweeted. "It's time to get to work, hold hearings & find bipartisan ways to improve our #HealthCare system."

Democrats have said the first task at hand is to stabilize the Obamacare insurance markets. At issue are the billions of dollars in federal reimbursements to insurance companies for covering millions of low-income Americans under Obamacare.

Trump in the past has threatened to suspend the so-called cost-sharing reductions as a way to speed Obamacare's demise.

Republican Senator Lamar Alexander and Democratic Senator Patty Murray have led efforts to craft a bipartisan plan to stabilize the insurance markets.

Their talks broke down as Republican leader pushed for a vote on Graham-Cassidy, but Murray said she is ready to resume them on a moment's notice.

"Making sure that the president made the payments that he can right now... is the single most important thing to do over the next several years to stabilize the marketplace, which will reduce the premiums for everyone," she said.

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