

White House seeks support for last-ditch Obamacare repeal bid

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The White House scrambled Tuesday to win over Republicans skeptical of their party's latest plan to overhaul Obamacare, in a last-ditch effort to make good on President Donald Trump's pledge to dismantle his predecessor's health reforms.

Trump himself phoned lawmakers and state governors seeking to tilt the scales in favor of the bill, seen as the Republican Party's final chance to repeal Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act without support from opposition Democrats.

And Vice President Mike Pence broke away from the United Nations General Assembly to return to Washington and drum up support for the plan, as Republicans insisted they were inching closer toward the magic number of 50 votes required to pass the measure.

"I want to make sure that members of the Senate know the president and our entire administration supports Graham-Cassidy," Pence said, referring to the bill's main sponsors Senators Lindsey Graham and Bill Cassidy.

"This is the moment, now is the time. We have 12 days," Pence said before lunching with Senate Republicans.

After September 30, procedural rules would require a 60-vote threshold for such bills instead of a simple 51-vote majority.

Should the vote be 50-50, the [vice president](#) breaks the tie.

After falling one vote short this summer, Republicans have revived efforts to shred Obamacare. Momentum swelled in the past week, after a group of Republican senators unveiled a bill that would replace the law's complex system of health care subsidies for different categories of individual, with block grants to every US state.

All Democrats remain opposed to the measure which Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer savaged as "even more dangerous and reckless than the previous bill that was defeated."

The plan is "a bill to end Medicaid as we know it, and let governors do the dirty work," he added, referring to the government health insurance program for the poor and disabled.

Skepticism has also bubbled up among some Republicans.

Senator Rand Paul said he is an outright no, saying it would do nothing to address the problems with the current system of marketplaces for health insurance.

"This does not look, smell or even sound like repeal," Paul told reporters Monday, anticipating years of chaos should the bill become law.

'Some convincing to do'

Attention has focused on the three Republican senators who sank the earlier effort in July: Susan Collins, John McCain and Lisa Murkowski.

How difficult it might be to flip them remained debatable.

"I am still looking" at the legislation, Murkowski told reporters.

McCain expressed concern that the bill is being rushed through and not following the "regular order" of hearings and debate.

Collins was worried that the new plan would dramatically slash Medicaid, and that the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) would not have enough time to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the bill's effects.

"We've got some convincing to do," acknowledged Senator Ron Johnson. "Time is running out."

Graham nevertheless sounded bullish on his bill, and in particular the possibility that McCain could back it.

"I feel very good about this," Graham said.

Trump has called Graham several times over the past 24 hours, complimenting the bill and asking "What can I do to help?" Graham said.

The effort was introduced last week on the same day Senator Bernie Sanders, a liberal icon, rolled out a plan for government-sponsored health care for all, a proposal that has gained traction among some rising-star Democrats.

Graham framed his bill as an ideological contrast.

"This is the only process left available to stop the march toward socialism," he said.

Democrats argue that Graham-Cassidy allows states to permit insurers to roll back protections for Americans with pre-existing conditions, and to charge them more for insurance.

Money to states would decline over time, eventually disappearing unless Congress appropriated new funding.

And the new "Trumpcare" measure would decimate Medicaid by halting its expansion and establishing a per-capita cap on spending, Schumer said.

The bill's supporters might be eager to avoid a CBO score. In July, the non-partisan body projected that the ranks of uninsured Americans would grow by 16 million, and premiums would rise 20 percent annually, over the next decade if the previous Obamacare repeal [bill](#) became law.

An earlier repeal effort would have led to 32 million fewer insured.

Democrats have expressed support for a bipartisan effort aimed at stabilizing Obamacare's insurance exchanges so that millions of Americans could maintain their coverage.

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