Trump seeks to rally support for health reform as doubts grow

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US President Donald Trump's deal-making skills were put to the test in his first major legislative battle Wednesday as Congress hotly debated a health care replacement plan opposed by several members of his own party.

Two committees in the House of Representatives began reviewing a sweeping bill that unwinds and replaces the Affordable Care Act, the emblematic health care reforms implemented under Barack Obama.

After seven years of Republican efforts to rip up the reforms known as Obamacare, it remained unclear whether Trump has the necessary votes to get the controversial replacement measure across the finish line—even with Republicans controlling the White House and both chambers of Congress.

Trump and his team are "in full sell mode to talk about how this is the best way to solve the problem that the American people face and why we believe that the solutions we put forward in this bill are the right ones," White House press secretary Sean Spicer said.

Democrats, blasting the Republican plan as a tax break for the wealthy and warning it will force millions of poor and middle-class Americans off health insurance, did their part to obstruct the process, and cautioned that Republicans were starting to ram the massive legislation through Congress just two days after it was introduced.

Republican leaders indicated they want to get the bill to the president's desk prior to the Easter break in early April.

Tempers flared in the House Energy and Commerce Committee as lawmakers clashed over how to proceed.

Democrats demanded a full reading of the bill and sought unsuccessfully to postpone its consideration for 30 days. They also threatened to introduce some 100 amendments to the measure.

"If people didn't like Obamacare, they're going to hate this," said House Democrat Eliot Engel.

"Middle class families get screwed under this bill," Democrat Tony Cardenas added angrily.

The replacement was crafted by Republican leaders and endorsed by Trump, who campaigned heavily last year on a pledge to repeal and replace Obamacare.

But influential Republicans are hardening against the plan, arguing it is "Obamacare Lite" and too similar to the law despised by conservatives.

Staunchly conservative groups like Heritage Action and Club for Growth rose up in opposition, as did several doctor and medical organizations.

Far-right lawmakers said the plan shunned conservative principles by maintaining government subsidies of the Affordable Care Act, under the guise of "refundable tax credits" for people to purchase their own health insurance.

"I don't think the plan they introduced yesterday is going to bring down the cost for working-class and middle-class families," Republican

Congressman Jim Jordan, former chairman of the conservative House Freedom Caucus, told MSNBC.

Hard sell

Under pressure to lure several Republican lawmakers back into the fold, Trump was scheduled to meet with conservative leaders in the White House later Wednesday.

He was also to have dinner with Senator Ted Cruz, who has said he does not believe the bill as written could pass the Senate.

Many conservatives oppose using health care tax credits, which would range from $2,000 a year for someone under age 30, to $4,000 for someone 60 or older. Families would get a maximum $14,000 in credits.

Democrats warn that those credits are on average less than the subsidies built into the Obamacare premiums.

Top Senate Democrat Chuck Schumer said millions of low-income and middle-class Americans would be forced to pay thousands of dollars more in premiums annually under the new plan.

The bill "will cause millions to lose insurance as well as blow a gigantic hole in the federal budget," he said.

The proposal also includes a tax break for insurance company executives making over $500,000 per year.

In opening remarks before the Energy and Commerce Committee, chairman Greg Walden promised the new plan "will not pull the rug out from anyone as we transition away from this failing law."

House Speaker Paul Ryan expressed confidence the bill had the necessary support.

"I have no doubt we'll pass this," Ryan told reporters. But he acknowledged there have been "growing pains" along the way as Republicans gained control of the White House and readied their repeal and replace bill.

Some House conservatives contradicted Ryan's positive outlook.

"With the current bill, there's not 218," the votes needed to pass legislation in the House, Congressman David Brat said according to Roll Call.

No Democrats have expressed support for the Republican plan.

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