

US lawmakers debate Obamacare replacement for more than 24 hours

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A US congressional panel surpassed 24 straight hours of debate Thursday on Republican plans to kill Obamacare, highlighting deep divisions over the proposed health reforms.

Lawmakers from Republican President Donald Trump's party hold a majority in both chambers of Congress, but many of those same lawmakers oppose the proposed legislation.

After 18 marathon hours of debate the House Ways and Means Committee early Thursday became the first panel to approve the bill that would repeal and replace Democrat Barack Obama's landmark health reforms.

But the House Energy and Commerce Committee—a separate panel that began reviewing the legislation at the same time on Wednesday—was still going strong a full day later, with no end in sight but plenty of weary faces among its 55 Democrats and Republican members.

"Tempers are probably fraying a little, and we're all a little tired," acknowledged Energy and Commerce chairman Greg Walden following testy exchanges over military veteran coverage in the proposed legislation.

Republican leaders have forged ahead with their proposal despite mounting opposition from within the party, heaping pressure on Trump as he faces resistance to his top legislative priority.

"House health-care bill can't pass Senate w/o major changes," Senator Tom Cotton tweeted early Thursday, joining a host of other Senate Republicans opposed to the measure in its current form.

While Republicans hold a strong majority in the House, they hold a narrow 52-48 majority in the Senate.

"To my friends in House: pause, start over. Get it right, don't get it fast," Cotton added.

Republican leaders indicate they want to pass the bill by early April.

But the plan suffered a setback Wednesday when several major hospital and medical organizations— including the American Medical Association, which represents more than 200,000 doctors—opposed the Trump-supported American Health Care Act.

Backers say the legislation guts Obamacare's mandates to purchase health care and rolls back its taxes.

Republican opponents however warn that the plan is too similar to Obamacare, and believe that it could cost even more.

Democrats, who are expected to oppose the bill with near-unanimity, say it would leave millions of poor and working-class Americans without health insurance.

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