



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 115th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 163

WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, JANUARY 5, 2017

No. 3

Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

O Lord, as our lips are open in prayer, so may our hearts be open to receive Your Spirit. Help us to bow to Your will and live lives devoted to Your providential leading.

Lord, bless our Senators in their work. Let faith, hope, and love abound in their lives. Help them to seek to heal the hurt in our Nation and world and to be forces for harmony and goodness. Remind them that they will be judged by their fruits and that You require them to be productive and faithful. May they seek to serve rather than be served, following Your example of humility and sacrifice. Open their minds and give them a vision of the unlimited possibilities available to those who trust You as their guide.

We pray in Your mighty Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ROUNDS). The majority leader is recognized.

OBAMACARE

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, ObamaCare was sold to the American people with a lot of promises and a lot

of fanfare—speech after speech, promise after promise, splashy PR campaigns, quirky YouTube videos.

But the American people never bought it, and the law never worked out the way it was promised. It opened up big problems and crashed computers on day one. Millions lost their health care plans and the doctors they were promised they could keep. Things only got worse from there. We have all gotten the calls and the letters. We have all seen the pain in our constituents' eyes. We all know how harmful this failed partisan experiment has been for those we represent.

We also understand our united mandate to do something about it.

The American people have hardly been subtle—hardly subtle—in their negative view of ObamaCare. That is borne out in the polling we have seen since the passage of this law 7 years ago. This past November, they again called out to Washington. Please help us, they said. Please get rid of this law that is hurting my family.

About eight in 10 favor changing ObamaCare significantly or replacing it altogether.

My message to the American people is this: We hear you. We hear you. We will act.

It is my sincere hope that Democrats will include themselves in that “we.”

I hope they will help us bring relief to the American people today and better health care solutions going forward. We want their ideas. We want their input. We value their contributions in the construction of durable, lasting, and effective reforms.

While I am not the kind of guy who believes history takes sides, I know some of our Democratic friends are, and by now, they must surely have concluded that the ObamaCare-or-nothing crowd cannot be anywhere but on the wrong side of history. There is no future with that crowd.

These are the guys who say ObamaCare's innumerable, well docu-

mented, clearly apparent problems are just a case of bad PR. They tried to laugh them off, literally. They tried to blame Republicans, blame the media, blame the American people themselves. They have even taken to denying reality altogether.

They say that ObamaCare has been “wonderful for America.” They call its implementation “fabulous.” Just before the election, President Obama actually said this: “The parade of horribles the Republicans have talked about haven't happened.” He really said that. He went further: “None of what they've said has happened.”

Really? So costs haven't gone up, then? Premiums just skyrocketed by double-digit increases—as high as 50 percent in some places. Deductibles have risen 10 times faster than inflation and nearly 6 times faster than paychecks.

So choice hasn't gone down then? Insurers are fleeing the exchanges, with more than half the country poised to soon have no more than one or two insurers to pick from. Americans are continuing to lose access to doctors and hospitals and health plans they like and were promised. Oh, they were promised they could keep those health care plans.

ObamaCare supporters may not like it, but these are simply the realities of this partisan law.

Now, you will notice they hardly talk about ObamaCare lowering costs or expanding choice anymore. They are down to just one or two talking points now, and even those are slipping away pretty fast. That is because, as Americans have unfortunately learned firsthand, having health insurance under ObamaCare is hardly the same thing as having health care. That is especially true for many who have been forced into Medicaid.

Let's just look at my home State as an example. Kentucky was once held up as a shining jewel of ObamaCare—well, no longer. ObamaCare predictably

• This “bullet” symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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has become a mess in Kentucky, just as it has across the Nation. That has proved a bit confounding to some of our friends over on the left.

The technical rate of the insured ticked up, they say. So why are so many Kentuckians upset? Why are they upset? Well, when you force Kentuckians into ObamaCare plans that many of their doctors won't accept, what did you think would happen? When you shoehorn folks with modest incomes into a plan with ever-growing premiums and deductibles so high they are afraid to get sick, what do you expect?

In fact, across the Nation, about 4 in 10 adults in ObamaCare aren't even sure they will be able to afford care if they really need it.

ObamaCare isn't truly solving problems or making our country healthier. It is a box-checking regime devoid of true compassion or empathy, a green-eyeshade exercise that misses something important—the lives of real people.

So ObamaCare is making things worse, and we now have a moral imperative to repeal and replace it—to bring relief to families now.

I hope every Member of this body will consider their role in that process because the pain Americans are experiencing is deeply personal. The betrayal middle-class families are feeling is clearly palpable, and, unless we do something soon, Americans will continue to lose their health plans. They will continue to get stuck with insurance that costs more and offers less. Costs will continue to rise unsustainably. Choices will continue to shrink uncontrollably. No amount of ObamaCare happy talk—no amount of it—or reality denial is going to change that.

Some will just never accept the facts, though. They will say we need only to tinker around the edges of ObamaCare. Everything will be fine. Others will try to claim that the failure of ObamaCare is a mandate for even more ObamaCare. They will claim that the solution is actually to move to the kind of fully government-run single-payer system that already collapsed in one of the most leftwing States in the Nation—the same system that 80 percent of voters just rejected in Colorado. Others will say we need only to install a massive new ObamaCare 2.0 system—ObamaCare 2.0—one that is mostly government-run.

We heard a lot of this so-called “public option” talk when Democrats thought they were on track to take the Senate and the White House. It was never a serious solution—just another admission of ObamaCare’s failure. In the words of one of our Democratic colleagues, it was a distraction as well. Of course, you can’t fix ObamaCare by piling on more ObamaCare.

Now, I am sure that won’t stop some from trying to convince us otherwise, but even amid the din, traces of reality continue to break through.

Consider what the Clintons said during the election. Former President Clinton called ObamaCare “the craziest thing in the world.” That is Bill Clinton.

Secretary Clinton said “lots of Americans” have insurance “too expensive for them to actually use.” That was the Democratic candidate for President of the United States.

The Democratic Governor of Minnesota said that “the Affordable Care Act is no longer affordable for increasing numbers of people.”

So reality is beginning to break through. Despite his ObamaCare pep rally yesterday, even the law’s namesake hasn’t been immune to sporadic admissions of the obvious. President Obama recently admitted that ObamaCare has “real problems,” he has bemoaned the human impact of his law as “premium increases” and “lack of competition and choice,” and admitted that, 7 years after ObamaCare’s passage—this is President Barack Obama of ObamaCare—“too many Americans still strain to pay for their physician visits and prescriptions, cover their deductibles, or pay their monthly insurance bills; struggle to navigate a complex, sometimes bewildering system, and remain uninsured.”

That pretty well sums it up. It is an indictment as damning as anything any Republican has said. It is something to keep in mind when you hear the predictable attacks from the far left.

Now, look, we already know their central contention is that Republicans somehow want to go back to the way things were before ObamaCare, which everyone, of course, knows is not true. It is an argument that conveniently leaves out the fact that things are now worse for many than they were before ObamaCare. That is not all we can expect to hear either. We will hear that repeal will cause insurers to flee the exchanges, which, by the way, news flash, is already happening. We will hear that repeal will plunge ObamaCare into a death spiral, which, they might have missed, is here already and fast approaching terminal velocity—the death spiral—right now.

We long warned that ObamaCare would eventually collapse under its own weight. That is exactly what is happening. Democrats chose to rip apart our health care system 7 years ago and give us the chaos we are seeing, and things will only continue to get worse unless we act now.

It is time to finally bring relief. The status quo is simply unsustainable. The reality is, that by any measure, ObamaCare has failed. It didn’t deliver on its core promises. It hurt more than it helped. Many are finding they can’t even use the insurance they now have.

History will record ObamaCare as a failed partisan experiment, an attack on the American middle class, a lesson to future generations about how not to legislate. Let’s be clear. ObamaCare’s failure is the fault of ObamaCare and

those who forced it on our country, not the American people, not the Republicans. We didn’t cause this problem, but we are now determined to provide relief. We are determined to live up to our promise to the American people and repeal this failed law.

Starting today, we will begin repairing the damage by passing the legislative tools necessary to repeal ObamaCare and begin to transition to more sensible health care solutions. We just laid down the ObamaCare repeal budget resolution this week. We will take it up soon, but repeal is only the first step. It clears the path for a replacement that costs less and works better than what we have now. Once repeal is enacted, there will be a stable transition period to a patient-centered health care system that gives Americans access to quality, affordable care.

We plan to take on this challenge in manageable pieces, not with another 2,700-page bill. That was one of ObamaCare’s initial mistakes and one we do not intend to repeat. Some of our friends across the aisle have mused publicly about their role in this process. I hope they will work with us. We hardly need another tired slogan from Democratic colleagues—after all, how does that move us ahead—but we do want their ideas, and we do want to work together to improve our health care system. That is the best way forward. That is certainly the way I prefer.

I hope our Democratic colleagues will join us in taking an important step forward soon by confirming TOM PRICE as HHS Secretary and Seema Verma as CMS Administrator. Some of you may remember the “red tape tower” we used to wheel around here. It represented the fact that while the ObamaCare bill may have run about 2,700 pages, its regulations run to tens of thousands of pages. That is what PRICE and Verma can get to work on once confirmed, stabilizing the health care market and bringing relief.

It isn’t going to be easy. It is going to take time. There will be bumps along the way, but we are going to do everything we can to heal the wounds of ObamaCare and move forward toward real care. We are going to move step-by-step. We want the widest possible coalition working to achieve real solutions for the people who are hurting and calling for our help.

Let’s give them that help. Let’s give them some hope. Let’s leave ObamaCare in the past and work together instead on reforms and outcomes we can all be proud of.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.