

17058 The Fight for Obamacare Has Turned

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The campaign to let 20 million Americans keep their health insurance is working. It still has a long way to go, and it's not guaranteed to succeed. But the progress of the last couple months is remarkable.

Thanks in part to a surge of activism — town hall meetings, online postings, calls to Congress — the politics of Obamacare have flipped. Many Americans have come to realize that the *care* part of the law matters much more than the *Obama* part. As a result, the Republicans no longer have a clear path to repeal.

President Trump, in his speech to Congress on Tuesday night, will probably pretend otherwise. He may repeat the same magical promises to pass a bill that's better and cheaper and covers everyone. Privately, though, he and his aides have begun to realize the mess they have made by promising the impossible.

Unable to agree on a policy, the party's leaders have settled on what The Wall Street Journal called a "gamble" and a "dare." They will push ahead with a now-or-never repeal bill, hoping that party loyalty will ultimately overcome substantive disagreements.

Why are Republicans suddenly having such a hard time agreeing about their No. 1 priority? They've run into two obstacles: reality and public opinion.

Republican leaders are now paying the price for their dishonest approach to fighting Obamacare. They blamed Obamacare (sometimes fairly, mostly not) for almost every health care problem.

Their promise to scrap taxes on the wealthy, for example, leaves them without money to cover people. That's why the independent Congressional Budget Office keeps concluding that the various Obamacare replacement plans would deprive millions of people of insurance.

Most Americans still have complaints about Obamacare. So do I. (Some subsidies are too small, as are the penalties for not signing up.) But they increasingly realize that no serious alternative exists. Getting rid of Obamacare means taking away health insurance, and medical care, from millions of people. No wonder the polls have flipped, and more than half the country now supports the law.

One group to watch is Republican governors. They met in Washington this weekend and tried to come up with an approach that would help their colleagues in Congress. But they couldn't. Too many Republican governors understand that a repeal would create major trouble.

Still, this is no time for complacency. Republicans have spent so long promising repeal that failure would leave them vulnerable to primary challenges and make them look weak. They have many incentives to pass a bill.

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