

Deseret News

In our opinion: Fix, don't repeal, Affordable Care Act

By In Our Opinion

For the Deseret News

Friday, Jan. 30 2015 12:00 a.m. MST

[\(Web Link\)](#)

Since a repeal of Obamacare isn't possible while President Obama remains in office, Congress should look to do what it can to improve health care and stop pursuing empty gestures that only please hardcore partisans and accomplish nothing.

Last year, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell announced his top congressional priority. "Number one: We certainly will have a vote on proceeding to a bill to repeal Obamacare," he said in an interview with rollcall.com. "It was a very large issue in the campaign."



That's certainly true, and such a vote will undoubtedly please many members of McConnell's Republican base. What it won't do, however, is actually repeal the Affordable Care Act. President Obama will undoubtedly veto any attempt to eliminate his signature legislative accomplishment, which means that all the effort McConnell and other Republicans put into organizing a repeal effort is destined to be a colossal waste of the nation's time and the taxpayers' money.

Of course Republicans aren't alone in squandering political capital on ideas that have no chance of becoming law. In his State of the Union message, President Obama put forth several proposals that will basically be dead on arrival in Congress. This kind of gamesmanship has become commonplace in Washington, but that doesn't justify Republicans using the ACA as just another partisan football. While it is true that the ACA remains unpopular with a majority of voters, it is also true that voters don't want to see it entirely repealed, either. Public opinion polls suggest that the preferred route to take is to engage in smaller reforms to fix the parts of the law that aren't working well.

Case in point: With 6.7 million new people now covered under the law, patients are encountering a severe shortage of primary care providers. The Associated Press reports that one in five Americans live in areas identified as having a primary care doctor shortage, and the Association of American Medical Colleges predicts that this problem will only get worse. It projects that there will be a shortfall of 66,000 primary care physicians in the coming decade as medical students choose to pursue higher-paying specialties instead. This means that more patients will seek care in emergency rooms instead of with a family doctor, which would increase costs for everyone going forward.

These are the kinds of problems that Congress ought to be addressing. Instead, some lawmakers are grandstanding with an all-or-nothing push for total repeal, while at the same time offering no positive health-care solutions of their own. Calls for a return to the pre-Obamacare status quo gloss over the harsh realities of the broken system the ACA was intended to improve.

It has often been said that politics is the art of the possible. Since the repeal of Obamacare simply isn't possible while this president remains in office, Congress would do well to turn its attention to doing what it can to improve health care in this country and stop pursuing empty gestures that only please hardcore partisans and accomplish nothing.