

Obamacare fight rages on, five years later

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St. George Spectrum
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(Photo: J. Scott Applewhite /
Associated Press)

ST. GEORGE – U.S. House and Senate Republicans pushed a pair of budget proposals Monday that include new efforts to repeal “Obamacare,” five years to the day after President Barack Obama officially signed the controversial health care reform law.



“The five-year anniversary of the Affordable Care Act is hardly cause for celebration,” Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, said in a speech on the Senate floor. “But, it should be time for all of us — particularly those who supported the law at the outset — to reflect on the last five years and decide how we want to move forward when it comes to our nation’s health care system.”

When Obama signed the ACA into law in a White House ceremony on March 23, 2010, there was applause-filled celebration and a declaration from the president that, “When I sign this bill, all of the overheated rhetoric over reform will finally confront the reality of reform.”

But the partisan split over the law has continued, and Monday’s action out of Congress only showed the latest indication that Republican leadership is still dedicated to seeing the law overturned.

In a release out of Hatch’s office on Monday, Senate Finance Committee chairman outlined a series of concerns, arguing that premium costs have spiked, that they are growing faster in the non-group health insurance market than they would have without the law and that they are

only expected to increase — a forecast from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office anticipates increases of 6 percent annually.

“The so-called Affordable Care Act is, by any objective measure, a dismal failure,” Hatch said. “While its proponents continue to cherry-pick favorable data points in order to fool the American people into thinking the law works, the majority of us know the truth — it’s time for a change.”

At the same time, the Supreme Court is set to rule this summer in a case that could cause major issues for the ACA.

Opponents of the law argue that its wording doesn’t allow government subsidies for coverage in states that have not set up their own insurance exchanges. If the Justices agree, the subsidies could stop and millions of people who had been able to buy insurance through the ACA may reconsider their willingness to keep their plans.

The American people appear to remain divided over the law, with a recent poll from the Kaiser Family Foundation indicating that 43 percent of respondents have a negative opinion of the law, while 41 percent have a favorable opinion.

The White House celebrated the anniversary on Monday, trumpeting some of the headway made under the law, and supporters argue that the ACA has been responsible for historic gains in coverage and reductions in cost.

An estimated 16.4 million Americans have gained coverage under the new law, according to estimates from the Department of Health and Human Services, and according to the U.S. Census Bureau there are now between 30 million and 40 million people still uninsured, compared to 49.9 million five years ago.

The White House figures up to 129 million people with pre-existing conditions are no longer at risk of being denied coverage, and another 105 million no longer have a lifetime limit on their coverage plans.

Insurance premiums have become more expensive, despite Obama’s predictions that they would drop — a Kaiser Family Foundation survey indicated annual premiums for employer-sponsored plans averaged \$6,025 for employee-only coverage in 2014, compared to \$5,049 in 2010, while family plans rose from \$13,770 to \$16,834.

But medical inflation is at a historic low, and the uncompensated care expenses of hospitals have fallen by more than 20 percent, largely because of Medicaid expansion, supporters argue.

“Five years in, it’s clear the (ACA) is doing exactly what it was intended to do,” said Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Connecticut, joining long line of Democratic leaders speaking in support of the law.

“More people have access to care, the number of uninsured is plummeting, and health care costs are growing at the slowest rate in 50 years.”

George Stoddard, an Ivins City resident who has written previously about the ACA for The Spectrum, said his own family is an example of the positives that came out of the law, noting that some loved ones had preexisting conditions that used to prevent them from getting coverage.

“It is fundamentally immoral from my perspective to control those costs by denying people access to health care,” Stoddard said, noting that while he considers the law “imperfect,” it has been impossible for the nation to move toward any reasonable discussion of possible improvements because Republicans have been so fiercely focused on repeal.

“We have a political system in which we cannot sit down and talk to each other and have reasonable alternatives,” he said.

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