



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on September 27, 2017

Senate Republicans Throw in the Towel on Latest ObamaCare Replacement

With their last-ditch effort to pass an ObamaCare replacement bill certain to fail, Senate Republicans have abandoned all attempts to modify, let alone repeal, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) this year.

“The bill is dead. It’s deader than a door nail,” [declared](#) Senator John Kennedy (R-La.).

During their weekly conference lunch Tuesday, Republican senators decided not to bring their latest ObamaCare replacement bill to the Senate floor for a vote. Senator Susan Collins (R-Maine) [announced](#) Monday that she would vote against the bill despite lobbying from the White House, including a call from President Donald Trump. Senators John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Rand Paul (R-Ky.) had already made their opposition public. With the GOP controlling only 52 Senate seats, the loss of Collins doomed the bill.

The bill, sponsored by Senators Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) and Bill Cassidy (R-La.), would have converted the ACA’s insurance subsidies and Medicaid funding into block grants to states and given states the opportunity to opt out of certain ACA regulations — if they could gain approval from Washington to do so. Over the weekend, the bill was rewritten to send more money to Maine and Alaska in order to entice Collins and Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) to vote for it, an effort that turned out to be for naught.

“The U.S. Senate cannot get the text of a bill on a Sunday night, then proceed to a vote just days later, with only one hearing — and especially not on an issue that is intensely personal to all of us,” Murkowski said in a [statement](#) Tuesday. She did not reveal her position on the legislation.

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) released its analysis of the bill Monday. The CBO claimed that by 2026 the bill would cause “millions” to lose their health insurance and Medicaid to suffer a \$1-trillion cut. Those numbers further dampened enthusiasm for the bill among Republicans.

However, as *Forbes*’ [Josh Archambault](#) pointed out, “The bill does not spend fewer dollars. In fact, under this bill, taxpayers will spend more over the next 10 years than they are spending right now. The ‘severe’ change being referenced in almost every news story is *a reduction in the rate of growth.*” (Emphasis in original.)

In reality, the bill “keeps a trillion dollars in taxes and spending and redistributes it,” Paul observed in a [Fox News op-ed](#) explaining his opposition to it. In addition, he wrote, it “doesn’t repeal a single ObamaCare insurance regulation.” All it does, he argued, is bring about “a redistribution of ObamaCare





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taxes and a new Republican entitlement program, funded nearly as extravagantly as ObamaCare.”

In other words, the defeat of the bill is hardly cause for mourning, particularly among constitutionalists, for whom Graham-Cassidy was little more acceptable than ObamaCare. It simply means that yet another “ObamaCare Lite” bill (Paul’s words) has met its deserved fate.

It didn’t help that Republicans tried to ram their various highly flawed ObamaCare replacement bills through Congress under the budget-reconciliation process to avoid the possibility of a Democratic filibuster. Yes, this is exactly how the ACA was originally foisted on the country, but it made a complete repeal (assuming the GOP actually wants one) all but impossible and imposed a [strict deadline](#) — September 30, the end of the fiscal year — on the process. Republicans will now have to wait for next year’s budget reconciliation to take another crack at ObamaCare unless they are willing to do the hard work of winning Democratic votes for their next proposal, which will almost surely force them to water it down even further.

In the meantime, GOP lawmakers want to move on to tax reform. The plan congressional leaders and Trump have negotiated is set to be released Wednesday. But before that happens, the rank-and-file want their leaders to know they’ve had enough of the secretly hatched (and re-hatched) bills, logrolling, and arm-twisting that have characterized the battle to replace ObamaCare.

“I’m tired of screwing around,” Kennedy said. “I want to do tax reform, but I’m not going to go through tax reform like I just went through health care where you don’t know what’s in the bill. It’s changing four times and you’re supposed to go defend it.”



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