



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on September 12, 2013

## House GOP Leadership Thwarted by Tea Party Conservatives over Defunding ObamaCare

A vote on a bill to continue government spending after September 30 offered by House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.) scheduled for Thursday [was abruptly cancelled](#) when it was clear that it would fail. [Called a “trick”](#) by some Tea Party conservatives, “hocus-pocus” by Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-Utah), and “chicanery” by Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas), Cantor’s bill clearly wouldn’t draw the 218 votes necessary for passage. Especially since some 80 House members [have signed a letter](#) drafted by Rep. Mark Meadows (R-N.C.) demanding that any bill offered defund major parts of ObamaCare outright, before the law takes effect on October 1.



Cantor’s bill linked a resolution that would defund ObamaCare with a bill that would keep the government running through the middle of December. The bill was designed so that the Senate would be forced to vote down the defunding of ObamaCare before voting for continued government spending. This was clearly an attempt to force those senators facing reelection in 2014 from states whose populace is opposed to ObamaCare to vote to keep the healthcare law alive, which could then be used as a hammer by Republicans in their attempt to regain control of the Senate.

It’s a risky move but it’s how sausage is made in Washington. Current funding for the government ends on September 30, and with the House scheduled to be in session for only five more working days before then, the clock is ticking and putting pressure on the GOP leadership to come up with something that Tea Party conservatives can live with. It’s going to be tight.

GOP leadership, perhaps best exemplified by long-term GOP standard bearer Rep. Tom Cole (R-Okla.), is in a pickle: “I think it is going to be difficult if we can’t come to a consensus.... I don’t think anything is for sure right now.”

The leader of those opposing Cantor’s “trick” bill is Texas Republican Senator Ted Cruz, who sees this as the last chance for the House to defund ObamaCare: “House Republicans should pass a continuing resolution (CR) that funds government in its entirety — except ObamaCare — and that explicitly prohibits spending any federal money, mandatory or discretionary, on ObamaCare.” Rep. Jack Kingston (R-Ga.) agrees that [now is the time](#):

I think that’s a risk you have to take. Any path forward, there’s [going to be] a political downside to it. We didn’t come here to get re-elected and have safe political careers. We came here to get things done.

I think that what our base wants is [for] us to go ahead and have the fight over Obamacare, right here, right now.



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Rep. Mike Simpson (R-Idaho) warned that having that fight right here, right now, could come back to haunt Republicans just as a similar fight in the mid-1990s did: “I think there’s a number of people [here] who don’t remember when the government shut down the last time. And who carried the burden of that? It was the Republicans.”

The Cruz “strategy,” if adopted by the House, would fund the government, except for ObamaCare. The Senate would then be forced either to vote it down, thus shutting down the government, or pass it and have it vetoed by President Obama. Cruz is hopeful that the “boomerang of blame” for shutting down the government would then be hung around the necks of the Democrats in the Senate and the White House.

All the risk isn’t being borne by the House, however. As Nate Silver [noted](#) in the *New York Times* in July, control of the Senate by the Republicans following the 2014 mid-term election is a “toss-up,” with 21 of the 35 seats held by Democrats up for reelection. As Silver noted, the Republicans would need to turn only six of them red to regain control and “more opportunities could also come into play if the national environment becomes more favorable to Republicans (such as a further slide in Mr. Obama’s approval ratings).”

Since Silver wrote that in July, Obama’s approval ratings have in fact slipped severely, and if Cantor’s bill, or some iteration of it is passed by the House, this improves the chances for a Republican Senate takeover next year.

In the meantime, however, ObamaCare would be fully funded and the Tea Party conservatives would be blamed for caving in on a hot button issue that representatives were painfully reminded of during the summer break in [noisy and boisterous town hall meetings](#) attended by their constituents.

[History is on the Republican side](#). No sitting president’s party has gained Senate seats in the midterm of his second term. In recent years the loss has averaged more than six seats, enough to return control to the Republicans.

Trying to meld all these factors into a pudding that Tea Party conservatives are willing to eat is going to be tricky. Some think the president is bluffing when he says he will veto any bill that comes to his desk that defunds his signature legislation, even if it means he’ll take the blame for any government shutdown. Others think the Tea Party conservatives will fold and go along with the establishment GOP House leadership. Or perhaps there will be found a middle ground that incorporates a solution to the “next big thing”: the debt ceiling which is expected to be hit by the middle of October.

[Otto von Bismarck was right](#): “Laws are like sausages; it is better not to see them being made.”

*A graduate of Cornell University and a former investment advisor, Bob is a regular contributor to The New American magazine and blogs frequently at [www.LightFromTheRight.com](http://www.LightFromTheRight.com), primarily on economics and politics. He can be reached at [badelman@thenewamerican.com](mailto:badelman@thenewamerican.com)*



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