

Senate health bill hit by CBO forecast of 22M uninsured

WASHINGTON — The road to passage for the Senate Republican health care bill got a little steeper Monday after the Congressional Budget Office determined the embattled draft legislation would cause 22 million people to lose health coverage by 2026.

The legislation would cause 15 million more people to lose coverage in 2018, and Medicaid enrollment would fall by 16 percent by 2026 under the proposal. In all, about 49 million Americans would lack health coverage under the legislation in 2026, compared with about 28 million under current law.

“The increase would be disproportionately larger among older people with lower income – particularly people between 50 and 64 years old with income of less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level,” the report found.

The bill would save the government \$321 billion over 10 years, mainly by cutting Medicaid spending by \$772 billion or 26 percent over 10 years, leading to 15 million fewer enrollees, the CBO estimated.

The disappointing numbers could complicate an already difficult task for Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., who needs 50 senators to vote for the widely criticized legislation to pass the upper chamber in a possible vote later this week.

But the CBO’s finding that the nation’s individual insurance markets would remain largely stable under the bill could help shore up support for the legislation.

The White House downplayed the report, claiming in a statement Monday that CBO estimates about health care and insurance coverage have been historically inaccurate.

“This history of inaccuracy, as demonstrated by its flawed report on coverage, premiums and predicted deficit arising out of Obamacare, reminds us that its analysis must not be trusted blindly,” a White House statement said ... “As more and more people continue to lose coverage and face fewer health care choices, President Trump is committed to repealing and replacing Obamacare, which has failed the American people for far too long.”

Four conservative GOP senators have said they won’t support the legislation as written: Ted Cruz of Texas, Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, Mike Lee of Utah and Rand Paul of Kentucky. Among Republican moderates, Sen. Dean Heller of Nevada – facing a tough re-election race in 2018 – said he opposes the legislation, while Sens. Susan Collins of Maine, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia are considered to be on the fence.

Senate leadership suggested there could be a vote as soon as Tuesday on a measure to put the bill into motion, but several members balked at the idea, saying they wanted more time.

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Johnson said Monday that he saw “positive aspects” to the CBO report, though he hadn’t read the whole review. He said he’d like more time to study the report, calling it a mistake for McConnell to move too quickly. With 52 members in the Senate, Republicans can only lose two members.

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