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Wire Report
Page 1 of 1

GOP tries to regroup after Obamacare repeal effort fails

WASHINGTON — Congressional Republicans on Friday glumly confronted the wreckage of their seven-year quest to abolish the Affordable Care Act, blaming each other and President Donald Trump for the dramatic early-morning collapse of the effort but finding no consensus on a way forward.

Some GOP lawmakers clung to long-shot hopes that some version of the legislation might be revived and that a deal might yet be struck before the fall. But the Senate's rejection early Friday of a last-ditch, bare-bones proposal to roll back just a few key planks of the law left GOP leaders with few options for uniting their polarized ranks.

Hours later, House Republicans gathered in the Capitol to take stock of the situation. Some raised the prospect of abandoning their longstanding pledge to "repeal and replace" the ACA and instead working with Democrats to shore up weak spots in the law known as Obamacare. But Trump signaled little interest in that approach, leaving many lawmakers baffled about how to proceed.

"I'm not a prophet," said Rep. Tom MacArthur, R-N.J., who helped push an earlier version of the repeal bill through the House. "I don't know what comes next."

Politically, the collapse of the repeal effort is potentially devastating for Republicans. It leaves Trump without a significant policy achievement in the critical first six months of his presidency; it casts a pall over the party's coming drives to pass a budget and overhaul the tax code; and it exposes GOP lawmakers to rising anger from their conservative base.

Substantively, it leaves much work undone. While the ACA has made health insurance accessible to millions of Americans, it has failed to contain rising costs, especially in the individual insurance market, where people without access to employer-provided coverage buy policies. Without federal action – and additional cash – those marketplaces could become unstable.

Lawmakers in both parties have called for stabilizing the marketplaces. But many Republicans have little appetite for entering negotiations on the issue with Democrats.

"I don't think the Democrats have any interest in doing anything productive," said Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, a vehement critic of the ACA. He added: "Republican senators are going to go home. They're going to hear from their constituents, and I don't expect the response to be muted."

At the meeting of House Republicans, Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., summed up the mood by citing an old Gordon Lightfoot tune called "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald," about sailors drowning on a sinking ship.

by Sean Sullivan, Kelsey Snell AND Ed O'keefe for The Washington Post

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