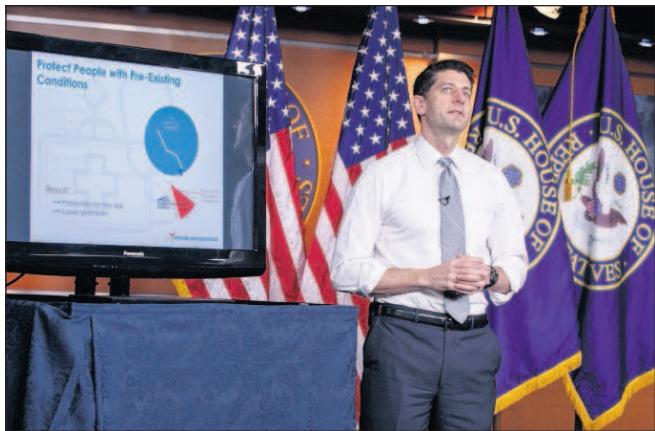


# GOP leaders claim momentum as health bill clears hurdles

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican leaders drove their long-promised legislation to dismantle Barack Obama's health care law over its first big hurdles in the House on Thursday and claimed fresh momentum despite cries of protest from right, left and center.

After grueling all-night sessions, the Energy and Commerce and Ways and Means committees both approved their portions of the bill along party-line votes. The legislation, strongly supported by President Donald Trump, would replace the tax penalties for the uninsured under Obama's Affordable Care Act with a conservative blueprint likely to cover far fewer people but, Republicans hope, increase choice.

The vote in Ways and Means came before dawn, while the Energy and Commerce meeting lasted



AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite  
**House Speaker Paul Ryan uses charts to make his case for the GOP's long-awaited plan to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act Thursday in Washington.**

past 27 hours as exhausted lawmakers groped for coffee refills, clean shirts and showers.

Angry Democrats protested that Republicans were acting in the dead of night to rip insurance coverage from poor Americans. But Republican

leaders sounded increasingly confident that, after seven years of empty promises about undoing Obama's law, they might finally be able to overcome their own deep divisions and deliver a bill to Trump to sign.

"This is the closest we will ever get to repealing

and replacing Obamacare," Speaker Paul Ryan of Wisconsin said at a press briefing where he arrived in shirt-sleeves to deliver a wonky power-point presentation on the GOP bill, part TED talk and part Schoolhouse Rock.

"The time is here. The time is now. This is the moment. And this is the closest this will ever happen."

Leaders are aiming for passage by the full House in the next couple of weeks, and from there the legislation would go to the Senate and, they hope, on to Trump's desk. The president has promised to sign it, declaring over Twitter on Thursday, "We are talking to many groups and it will end in a beautiful picture!"

Yet at the same time the president is leaving himself a political out, privately telling conservative leaders that if the whole effort fails, Demo-

crats will ultimately shoulder the blame for the problems that remain. That's according to a participant in the meeting Wednesday who spoke only on condition of anonymity to relay the private discussion.

Democrats reject that notion, and the entire GOP effort.

"What we have seen is the Republicans' long-feared and job-killing health bill that means less coverage and more cost to American people," said House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi of California. "I don't think the president really knows what he's talking about."

The GOP legislation would kill Obama's requirement that everyone buy insurance by repealing the tax fines imposed on those who don't. The bill would replace income-based subsidies Obama provided with tax credits based more on age, and insurers would

charge higher premiums for customers who drop coverage for over two months

The extra billions Washington has sent states to expand the federal-state Medicaid program would phase out, and spending on the entire program would be capped at per-patient limits. Around \$600 billion in 10-year tax boosts that Obama's statute imposed on wealthy Americans and others to finance his overhaul would be repealed. Insurers could charge older customers five times more than younger ones instead of the current 3-1 limit but would still be required to include children up to age 26 in family policies, and they would be barred from imposing annual or lifetime benefit caps.

Democrats said Republicans would yank health coverage from many of the 20 million who gained it under Obama's statute.



AP Photo/Evan Vucci, File  
**In this Feb. 13 file photo, Mike Flynn arrives for a news conference in the East Room of the White House.**

## White House: Trump unaware of Flynn's foreign agent work

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump was not aware that his former national security adviser, Michael Flynn, had worked to further the interests of the government of Turkey before appointing him, White House press secretary Sean Spicer said Thursday.

Spicer's comments came two days after Flynn and his firm, Flynn Intel Group Inc., filed paperwork with the Justice Department formally identifying him as a foreign agent and acknowledging that his work for a company owned by a Turkish businessman could have aided Turkey's government.

Asked whether Trump knew about Flynn's work before he appointed him as national security adviser, Spicer said, "I don't believe that that was known."

Flynn and his company filed the registration paperwork describing \$530,000 worth of lobbying before Election Day on behalf of Inovo BV, a Dutch-based company owned by Turkish businessman Ekim Alptekin. In an interview with The Associated Press, Alptekin said Flynn did so after pressure from Justice Department officials.

The filing this week was the former head of the Defense Intelligence Agency's first acknowledgement that his consulting business furthered the interests of a foreign government while he was working as a top adviser to Trump's presidential campaign.

Flynn's disclosure that his lobbying — from August through November — may have benefited Turkey's authoritarian government led by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan came as Flynn has drawn scrutiny from the FBI for his contacts with Russian officials. Trump fired Flynn last month for misleading Vice President Mike Pence and other administration officials about his contacts with Russia's ambassador to the U.S., Sergey Kislyak.

In paperwork filed with the Justice Department's Foreign Agent Registration Unit, Flynn and his firm acknowledged that his lobbying "could be construed to have principally benefited the Republic of Turkey." The lobbying contract ended after Trump's election in November, according to the paperwork.

A spokesman for Flynn, Price Floyd, said the general was not available for an

interview Thursday. Floyd referred the AP to Flynn's filing in response to questions about why he and his firm had decided to register this week.

Flynn's attorney, Robert Kelner, declined to comment through a spokesman for his law firm, Covington & Burling. The Turkish Embassy also didn't respond to questions from the AP.

Spicer said he didn't know what Flynn had disclosed about his background and lobbying work during the White House's vetting of him for appointment as national security adviser.

Spicer said Flynn was free to do the lobbying work because it occurred while he was a private citizen.

"There's nothing nefarious about doing anything that's legal as long as the proper paperwork is filed," Spicer said. He declined to say whether Trump would have appointed Flynn if he had known about the lobbying.

After Flynn joined the Trump administration, he agreed not to lobby for five years after leaving government service and never to represent foreign governments. Flynn's newly disclosed lobbying would not have violated that pledge because it occurred before he joined the Trump administration in January, but the pledge precludes Flynn from ever doing the same type of work again in his lifetime.

Under the Foreign Agent Registration Act, U.S. citizens who lobby on behalf of foreign governments or political entities must disclose their work to the Justice Department. Willfully failing to register is a felony, though the Justice Department rarely files criminal charges in such cases. It routinely works with lobbying firms to get back in compliance with the law by registering and disclosing their work.

More than a month before Flynn was appointed as national security adviser, news accounts and Democratic senators had raised questions about potential conflicts of interest regarding Flynn's work for the Turkish company. Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., criticized Flynn's work and late disclosure again Thursday as troubling.

"Gen. Flynn's behavior seems to be part of a larger pattern of poor judgment from members of this administration," she said.



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