

CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET ANALYSIS

Millions to lose coverage under GOP bill

Health secretary says findings don't take into account other rules, future legislation

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Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Fourteen million Americans would lose coverage next year under House Republican legislation remaking the nation's health care system, and the number would balloon to 24 million by 2026, Congress' budget analysts projected Monday. Their report deals a stiff blow to a GOP drive already under fire from both parties and large segments of the medical industry.

The Congressional Budget Office report undercuts a central argument President Donald Trump and Republicans have cited for swiftly rolling back the 2010 health care overhaul: that the insurance markets created under that statute are "a disaster" and about to implode. The congressional experts said that largely would not be the case, that the market for individual policies "would probably be stable in most areas under either current law or the (GOP) legislation."

The report also flies in the face of Trump's talk of "insurance for everybody," which he stated in January. He has since embraced a less expansive goal — to "increase access" — advanced by House Speaker Paul Ryan and other Republicans.

Health secretary Tom Price told reporters at the White House the report was "simply wrong" and that he disagreed "strenuously," saying it omitted the impact of additional GOP legislation and regulatory changes that the Trump administration plans for the future.

Still, the budget office's estimates provide a detailed, credible appraisal of the Republican effort to unravel former President Barack Obama's 2010 overhaul. The office has a four-decade history of even-handedness and is currently headed by an appointee recommended by Price when he was a congressman. Trump



AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite
House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Rep. Greg Walden, R-Ore., flanked by House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Rep. Kevin Brady, R-Texas, left, and House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy of Calif., speaks during a news conference on Capitol Hill in Washington on Friday.

has repeatedly attacked the agency's credibility, citing its significant underestimate of the number of people who would buy insurance on state and federal exchanges under "Obamacare."

On the plus side for Republicans, the budget office said the GOP measure would reduce federal deficits by \$337 billion over the coming decade. That's largely because it would cut the federal-state Medicaid program for low-income Americans and eliminate subsidies that Obama's law provides to millions of people who buy coverage.

It also said that while the legislation would push premiums upward before 2020 by an average of 15 to 20 percent compared to current law, premiums would move lower after that. By 2026, average premiums for individuals would be 10 percent lower than under Obama's statute, it said.

The GOP bill would obliterate the tax penalties Obama's law imposes on people who don't buy coverage,

and it would eliminate the federal subsidies reflecting peoples' income and premium costs for millions.

It instead would provide tax credits based largely on recipients' ages, let insurers charge more for older people and boost premiums for those who let coverage lapse. It would phase out Obama's expansion of Medicaid to 11 million additional low earners, cap federal spending for the entire program, repeal taxes the statute imposes and halt federal payments to Planned Parenthood for a year.

Administration officials took strong issue with the budget office's projections of lost coverage.

"We believe that our plan will cover more individuals and at a lower cost and give them the choices that they want," Price said.

And House Speaker Ryan said in a statement the GOP legislation "is not about forcing people to buy expensive, one-size-fits-all coverage. It is about giving people more choices and better access to a

plan they want and can afford." In fact, on the Fox News Channel, he said the CBO report "exceeded my expectations."

Not in a good way, Democrats said. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York said the projections show "just how empty the president's promises, that everyone will be covered and costs will go down, have been."

"I hope they would pull the bill. It's really the only decent thing to do," said House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi of California.

The American Medical Association, which has opposed the Republican bill because it would reduce coverage, said the report shows the legislation would cause "unacceptable" consequences.

Two House committees approved the legislation last week, and Ryan wants to bring it to the full House next week. Though many Republicans back the bill, conservatives say it doesn't go far enough in repealing Obama's law while moderates

whose states used the statute to expand Medicaid don't want people losing coverage.

GOP leaders hope the Senate will consider the measure before breaking for an early April recess. Opposition from both ends of the Republican spectrum in that chamber suggests senators might demand significant changes.

The budget office attributed projected increases in uninsured Americans to the GOP bill's elimination of tax penalties for people who don't buy insurance, to reduced federal subsidies for many people who buy policies and to the reductions in Medicaid.

By 2026, the office estimated, a total of 52 million people would lack insurance, including 28 million expected to lack coverage under Obama's statute.

Even though Republican tax credits would be less generous than those under Obama's law, the combination of those credits and other changes to lower premiums would attract enough healthy people to stabilize markets under the new plan, the report said.

The budget office sees federal spending on Medicaid declining by \$880 billion over the coming decade — about 25 percent lower than current projections. That would push about 14 million low-income people off the federal-state program.

Though average premiums are ultimately expected to fall, that would vary for people of different ages because compared to Obama's law Republicans would let older people be charged more.

The report estimates that individuals' out-of-pocket costs under the GOP bill "would tend to be higher than those anticipated under current law." That runs counter to another claim from the president, that his health care plan would offer "much lower deductibles."

CBO had predicted that 23 million people would be enrolled under Obama's law, but the number proved to be about 12 million — largely because CBO overestimated the extent to which the individual mandate would prompt them to buy coverage.

Justice Dept. asks for more time on wiretapping evidence

WASHINGTON (AP) — Facing a Monday deadline, the Justice Department asked lawmakers for more time to provide evidence backing up President Donald Trump's unproven assertion that his predecessor wiretapped his New York skyscraper during the election. The request came as the White House appeared to soften Trump's explosive allegation.

The House intelligence committee said it would give the Justice Department until March 20 to comply with the evidence request. That's the date of the committee's first open hearing on the investigation into Russia's interference in the 2016 election and possible contacts between Trump associates and Russia.

A spokesman for the committee's Republican chairman said that if the Justice Department doesn't meet the new deadline, the panel might use its subpoena power to gather information.

"If the committee does not receive a response by then, the committee will ask for this information during the March 20 hearing and may resort to a compulsory process if our questions continue to go unanswered," said Jack Langer,



Stephen Crowley/The New York Times
Donald Trump, the president-elect, and President Barack Obama meet in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, Nov. 10, 2016.

a spokesman for Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Calif.

Trump's assertions have put his administration in a bind. Current and former administration officials have been unable to provide any evidence of the Obama administration wiretapping Trump Tower, yet the president's aides have been reluctant to publicly contradict their boss.

White House spokesman Sean Spicer tried to clarify Trump's comments Monday, saying the president wasn't using the word wiretapping literally, noting that Trump had put the term in quotation marks.

"The president used the word wiretap in quotes to mean broadly surveillance and other activities," Spicer said. He also suggested Trump wasn't accusing former President Barack Obama specifically, but instead referring to the actions of the Obama administration.

Trump himself has not commented on the matter since his March 4 tweets, in which he said he had "just found out that Obama had my 'wires tapped' in Trump Tower just before the victory." He also wrote: "Is it legal for a sitting President to be 'wire tapping' a race for president?"

Fired prosecutor leaves misty-eyed to applause

NEW YORK (AP) — A fired federal prosecutor returned to his office on Monday to say his goodbyes and tell the staff of one of the highest-profile groups of prosecutors in the nation to keep up their good work.

Preet Bharara's return came two days after he was fired after refusing to submit his resignation along with 45 other appointees of Democratic former President Barack Obama who were asked to step down Friday.

Inside the Manhattan building, Bharara spoke to dozens of employees who had worked for him since his summer 2009 appointment to an office that has proved to be a hotbed of future leaders in government and the law. He

told them that he hoped his children would grow up with the moral code and character of those who inhabit the office and that the workers would continue the quality of work they had done for generations, according to several people who heard him speak.

The workers later formed parallel rows behind barricades outside the building before Bharara, wearing only a suit in freezing temperatures, walked through the column to steady applause, shaking hands and hugging employees.

A small group of reporters approached him, and he was asked if he had a message for Republican President Donald Trump. It was unclear if he heard the question.

"I love New York. And this is the best, the best prosecutor's office you've ever seen," the misty-eyed prosecutor said, pointing toward the workers as he headed back their way.

The request to resign from the office of Attorney General Jeff Sessions came as a surprise to federal prosecutors after Bharara had been asked by Trump and Sessions during a meeting at Trump Tower in late November to continue his work.

But the firing of prosecutors appointed by previous presidents is common when a new administration takes over, though it does not always occur abruptly before new prosecutors can be put in place.

Parliament gives UK power to begin 'Brexit'

LONDON (AP) — Britain lurched closer to leaving the European Union Monday when Parliament stopped resisting and gave Prime Minister Theresa May the power to file for divorce from the bloc.

But in a blow to May's government, the prospect of Scotland's exit from the United Kingdom suddenly appeared nearer, too. Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon called for a referendum on independence within two years to stop Scotland being

dragged out of the EU against its will.

In an announcement that took many London politicians by surprise, Sturgeon vowed that Scotland would not be "taken down a path that we do not want to go down without a choice."

Sturgeon spoke in Edinburgh hours before the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill passed its final hurdle in Parliament's upper chamber, the House of Lords.

The House of Commons

approved the bill weeks ago, but the 800-strong Lords fought to amend it, inserting a promise that EU citizens living in the U.K. will be allowed to remain after Britain pulls out of the bloc.


They also added a demand that Parliament get a "meaningful" vote on the final deal between Britain and the remaining 27 EU nations.

Both amendments were rejected Monday by the Commons, where May's Conservatives have a majority.

Little Darlings!



This special section will be filled with photos of and messages for adorable little darlings from Umatilla County. Families will want to keep this special keepsake for their child and family for years to come.



*Olivia,
I loved you from the very start.
You stole my breath, embraced my heart.
Our life together has just begun.
You're part of me, my little one.
Love, Mom*

Your Name: _____
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Child's Name: _____
Message: _____

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