

# GOP health victory may be fleeting as wary Senate awaits

McConnell plans to allow simple majority

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Associated Press



President Donald Trump, accompanied by GOP House members, speaks in the Rose Garden of the White House in Washington, Thursday after the House pushed through a health care bill.

AP Photo/Evan Vucci

WASHINGTON — Senate Republicans wasted no time on Friday showing they have little use for the House bill to repeal and replace Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act amid fears among Americans that people already sick won't be able to get affordable insurance.

"I'm going to read the House bill, find out what it costs and where I find good ideas there, why we'll borrow them. But basically we're writing our own bill," Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., chairman of the Senate health committee, said in an interview.

"At this point, there seem to be more questions than answers about its consequences," said moderate GOP Sen. Susan Collins of Maine, whose vote may prove one of the hardest to get for President Donald Trump and Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky.

And Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., said over Twitter: "A bill — finalized yesterday, has not been scored, amendments not

allowed, and 3 hours final debate — should be viewed with caution."

The outspoken and immediate skepticism pointed to a long road ahead in the Senate. And for a president who's already expressed disappointment in Congress' slow-moving ways, more frustration seemed assured.

"I don't think anyone in the Senate is going to be bullied into artificial benchmarks or timelines," said Josh Holmes,

a GOP consultant and former chief of staff to McConnell. "It will be a very different process that will look very different from the one that we just saw unfolding in the House."

Senate leaders have repeatedly vowed success. "Failure is not an option," No. 2 Senate leader John Cornyn, R-Texas, said earlier this year.

McConnell plans to move forward under special proce-

dures that allow legislation to pass with a simple majority vote, instead of the 60 usually required for major bills in the Senate. That means he will only need Republican votes, which is all he can rely on anyway since Democrats are refusing to participate in dismantling Obama's law. But under complicated Senate rules, it also limits what can go into the legislation.

And with only a slim 52-48 majority, McConnell

can lose only two senators from his sometimes fractious caucus, which runs the gamut from moderates like Collins to conservatives like Rand Paul of Kentucky and Ted Cruz of Texas. Then there are those senators who are up for re-election in 2018. Fortunately for McConnell only two are in any serious jeopardy, Dean Heller of Nevada and Jeff Flake of Arizona, but they are certain to be particularly cautious about casting their vote for anything that jeopardizes their constituents.

There was immediate evidence of the political pressure that awaits.

Hinting at the attacks to come as next year's elections draw nearer, the Democratic House and Senate campaign committees both released digital ads lambasting supporters of the legislation. Major Democratic Super PAC American Bridge also released a digital ad declaring: "Tell Senate Republicans this is their mess now, and we are watching." The legislation could become a major issue for vulnerable House Republicans in divided districts, and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi has already threatened they will "glow in the dark" over their vote.

At the "#IAMAPreexisting-Condition" hashtag on Friday,

Twitter users including actress Alyssa Milano described how the proposed House law could affect them or family members dealing with serious illnesses. Some describe suffering from cancer, hereditary diseases or post-traumatic stress disorder brought on by combat.

On the other side, a GOP group allied with House leadership announced plans to run TV ads thanking Republicans who voted for the repeal bill in key districts.

The House bill, passed 217-213, would end the health care law's fines on people who don't purchase policies and erase its taxes on health industry businesses and higher-earning people. It would dilute consumer-friendly insurance coverage requirements, like letting states permit insurers to charge higher premiums for customers with pre-existing medical conditions. The latter provision was the focus of much attention from opponents Friday.

The measure would also water down the subsidies that help consumers afford health insurance, and it would cut Medicaid, the health insurance program for the poor and disabled, including ending extra federal payments to 31 states that expanded Medicaid to cover more people.

## BRIEFLY

### Trump transition raised flags about Flynn Russia contacts

WASHINGTON (AP) — In late November, a member of Donald Trump's transition team approached national security officials in the Obama White House with a curious request: Could the incoming team get a copy of the classified CIA profile on Sergey Kislyak, Russia's ambassador to the United States?

Marshall Billingslea, a former Pentagon and NATO official, wanted the information for his boss, Michael Flynn, who had been tapped by Trump to serve as White House national security adviser. Billingslea knew Flynn would be speaking to Kislyak, according to two former Obama administration officials, and seemed concerned Flynn did not fully understand he was dealing with a man rumored to have ties to Russian intelligence agencies.

To the Obama White House, Billingslea's concerns were startling: a member of Trump's own team suggesting the incoming Trump administration might be in over its head in dealing with an adversary.

The request now stands out as a warning signal for Obama officials who would soon see Flynn's contacts with the Russian spiral into a controversy that would cost him his job and lead to a series of shocking accusations hurled by Trump against his predecessor's administration.

In the following weeks, the Obama White House would grow deeply distrustful



AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster, File

In this Feb. 10, 2017 file photo, then-National Security Adviser Michael Flynn sits in the East Room of the White House in Washington.

of Trump's dealing with the Kremlin and anxious about his team's ties. The concern — compounded by surge of new intelligence, including evidence of multiple calls, texts and at least one in-person meeting between Flynn and Kislyak — would eventually grow so great Obama advisers delayed telling Trump's team about plans to punish Russia for its election meddling. Obama officials worried the incoming administration might tip off Moscow, according to one Obama adviser.

### Texas officer charged with murder in death of teen

DALLAS (AP) — A white former Texas police officer has been released on bond after he turned himself in to authorities to face a murder warrant in the shooting of a black teenager.

Roy Oliver posted a \$300,000 bond after turning himself in at the Parker County Jail in Weatherford, about 95 miles west of Dallas.

An arrest warrant was issued Friday for the former Balch Springs police officer, accusing him of murder in the death of 15-year-old Jordan Edwards. Oliver fired a rifle at a car full of teenagers leaving a party April 29, killing Edwards.

The teen's death led to protests calling for Oliver to be fired and charged. On Tuesday, the same day that the officer was fired, news broke of the Justice Department's decision not to charge two white police officers in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in the shooting death of a black man in 2016. And a white officer in North Charleston, South Carolina, pleaded guilty that day to federal civil rights charges in the fatal shooting of a black man in 2015.

Edwards and his two brothers and two other teenagers were driving away from an unruly house party in Balch Springs late Saturday night when Oliver opened fire on their vehicle with a rifle. The bullets shattered the front passenger-side window and struck Edwards. Oliver's firing Tuesday was for violating department policies in the shooting.

It took a few moments for Edwards' 16-year-old brother, who was driving, and other passengers to notice that he was slumped over in his seat.

The investigation into the shooting "will continue and does not conclude with the arrest," sheriff's spokeswoman Melinda Urbina said.

### U.S. company denies security risks, prostitution at Iraq base

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Interior Department on Friday identified 27 national monuments, mostly in Western states, that it is reviewing for possible changes to the protections created by Republican and Democratic presidents over the past two decades.

President Donald Trump ordered the review last month, saying protections imposed by his three immediate predecessors amounted to "a massive federal land grab" that "should never have happened."

A list released Friday includes 22 monuments on federal land in 11, mostly Western states, including Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante in Utah, Nevada's Basin and Range and Hanford Reach in Richland, Washington.

The review also targets five marine monuments in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, including a huge reserve in Hawaii established in 2006 by President George W. Bush and expanded last year by President Barack Obama.

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