

# Little progress evident as GOP hunts health bill votes

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell explored options for salvaging the battered Republican health care bill Wednesday but confronted an expanding chorus of GOP detractors, deepening the uncertainty over whether the party can resuscitate its bedrock promise to repeal President Barack Obama's overhaul.

A day after McConnell, short of votes, unexpectedly abandoned plans to whisk the measure through his chamber this week, fresh GOP critics popped forward. Some senators emerged from a party lunch saying potential amendments were beyond cosmetic, with changes to Medicaid and Obama's consumer-friendly insurance coverage requirements among the items in play.

"There's a whole raft of things that people are talking about, and some of it's trimming around the edges and some of it's more fundamental," said Sen. Bill Cassidy, R-La. "Right now, they're still kind of, 'Can we do it?' and I can't answer that."

Yet while this week's retreat on a measure McCo-



President Donald Trump speaks during an energy roundtable with tribal, state, and local leaders in the White House, Wednesday in Washington.

nnell wrote behind closed doors dented his reputation as a consummate legislative seer, no one was counting him out.

"Once in Glacier National Park I saw two porcupines making love," said Sen. Pat Roberts, R-Kan. "I'm assuming they produced smaller porcupines. They produced something. It has to be done carefully. That's what we're doing now."

Having seen the House approve its health care package in May six weeks after an earlier version collapsed, Democrats were far from a victory dance.

"I expect to see buyouts

and bailouts, backroom deals and kickbacks to individual senators to try and buy their vote," said Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y. "What I don't expect to see, yet, is a dramatic rethink of the core" of the bill.

A day after McConnell prodded Republicans by saying a GOP failure would force him to negotiate with Schumer, the New Yorker set a price for such talks — no Medicaid cuts or tax reductions for the wealthy. No negotiations seem imminent.

Facing a daunting equation — the bill loses if three of the 52 GOP senators

oppose it — the list of Republicans who've publicly complained about the legislation reached double digits, though many were expected to eventually relent. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., said "of course" his support was uncertain because he wants to ease some of the measure's Medicaid cuts, and Sen. Ben Sasse, R-Neb., told The Omaha World-Herald that the bill was not a full repeal, adding, "Nebraskans are dissatisfied with it and so am I."

McConnell, R-Ky., wants agreement by Friday on revisions so the Senate can approve it shortly after returning in mid-July from an Independence Day recess. Several senators scoffed at that timetable, with McCain saying, "Pigs could fly."

At the White House, Trump continued his peculiar pattern of interspersing encouragement to GOP senators trying to tear down Obama's 2010 statute with more elusive remarks.

Trump told reporters that Republicans have "a great health care package" but said there would be "a great, great surprise," a comment that went without explanation. On Tuesday, he said it would be "great if we get it done" but

"OK" if they don't, and two weeks ago he slammed as "mean" the House version of the bill that he'd previously lionized with a Rose Garden ceremony.

The GOP's health care slog has highlighted discord between moderates who say the bill cuts Medicaid and federal health care subsidies too deeply, and conservatives eager to reduce government spending and shrink premiums by letting insurers sell policies with scantier coverage than Obama's law allows.

GOP support for the measure sagged this week after a report by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimated that it would produce 22 million fewer insured people by 2026 while making coverage less affordable for many, especially older and poorer Americans. It wasn't helped when an NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist Poll said that 17 percent of people approved of the Senate bill.

McConnell showed no signs of abandoning his push for the legislation.

"We'll continue working so we can bring legislation to the floor for debate and ultimately a vote," he said as the Senate convened Wednesday.

To succeed, McConnell must balance demands from his party's two wings. It's a challenge that's intricate but not impossible, with some saying an eventual compromise could include elements both want.

Centrists from states that expanded Medicaid health insurance for the poor under Obama's law are battling to ease the bill's cutoff of that expansion, and to make the measure's federal subsidies more generous for people losing Medicaid coverage. These senators, including Ohio's Rob Portman and West Virginia's Shelley Moore Capito, also want expanded funds to ease the death toll from the illegal use of drugs like opioids.

Conservatives including Ted Cruz of Texas, Utah's Mike Lee and Kentucky's Rand Paul want to let insurers sell policies with fewer benefits. Some would further trim Medicaid spending and the health care tax credits, with Paul seeking to erase the package's billions to help insurers contain costs for lower-earning customers and protect the companies against potential losses.

Each group has been trying to grow its numbers to boost clout with McConnell.

# Trump rakes in \$10 million at first re-election fundraiser

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump was whisked a few blocks from the White House to the Trump hotel on Wednesday night for his first re-election fundraiser, where he raised an estimated \$10 million behind closed doors.

Some 40 months ahead of the 2020 election, the president held court for about two hours at a \$35,000-per-plate donor event at the Trump International Hotel. About 300 people were expected to attend the event, which was expected to raise about \$10 million, said Lindsay Jancek, a spokeswoman for the Republican National Committee.

Security was tight at the hotel, where guests in long gowns and crisp suits began arriving around 5 p.m. But the event also drew critics. The president's motorcade was greeted by dozens of protesters, who hoisted signs with slogans like "Health care not tax cuts" and chanted "Shame! Shame!"

Among the fundraiser's attendees: Longtime GOP fundraiser-turned television commentator Mica Mosbacher and Florida lobbyist and party financier Brian Ballard were among the fundraiser's attendees.

Breaking the tradition of his predecessor, Trump didn't allow reporters into the event — despite an announcement earlier in the day that a pool of reporters would be allowed in to hear the president's remarks.

"It's a political event and they've chosen to keep that separate," White House deputy press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said when asked why the event is closed to the media.

After reporters complained, Sanders announced that the president's remarks would be opened to the press — only to reverse herself hours later.



Protesters yell at patrons in the outdoor seating area at the Trump Hotel, Wednesday in Washington. President Donald Trump is hosted a fundraiser at the hotel.

Sanders said there was nothing unusual about raising political cash so early.

"He's raising money for the party," she said. "I don't think that's abnormal for any president."

Sanders' statement that Trump is raising cash for the GOP told only part of the story, though.

The first cut of the money raised goes to Trump's 2020 re-election campaign. The rest gets spread among the RNC and other various Republican entities. Having multiple beneficiaries is what allowed Trump to ask for well above the usual \$5,400 per-donor maximum for each election cycle.

Those contribution limits are likely to change because this fundraiser is so early that new donation limits for 2020 have not been set by the Federal Election Commission.

Trump's hotel has become a place to see and be seen by current and former Trump staffers, as well as lobbyists, journalists and tourists. Several Washington influencers popped into the hotel's lobby even though they didn't plan to attend the event.

Several bar patrons also expressed enthusiasm about the unusually lucrative fundraiser so soon after the last

election.

Trump's decision to hold a fundraiser at his own hotel again raised issues about his continued financial interest in the companies he owns. Unlike previous presidents who have entirely divested from their business holdings before taking office, Trump moved his global business empire assets into a trust that he can take control of at any time. That means that when his properties — including his Washington hotel — do well, he stands to make money.

Trump technically leases the hotel from the General Services Administration, and profits are supposed to go to an account of the corporate entity that holds the lease, Trump Old Post Office LLC. It remains unclear what might happen to any profits from the hotel after Trump leaves office, or whether they will be transferred to Trump at that time.

Under campaign finance rules, neither the hotel nor the Trump Organization that operates it can donate the space. It must be rented at fair-market value and paid for by either the Trump campaign, the RNC or both.

In the first three months of this year, the Trump campaign had already raised more than \$7 million.

# New visa rules for 6 mainly Muslim nations

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration on Wednesday set new criteria for visa applicants from six mainly Muslim nations and all refugees that require a "close" family or business tie to the United States. The move came after the Supreme Court partially restored President Donald Trump's executive order that was widely criticized as a ban on Muslims.

Visas that have already been approved will not be revoked, but instructions issued by the State Department say that new applicants from Syria, Sudan, Somalia, Libya, Iran and Yemen must prove a relationship with a

parent, spouse, child, adult son or daughter, son-in-law, daughter-in-law or sibling already in the United States to be eligible. The same requirement, with some exceptions, holds for would-be refugees from all nations that are still awaiting approval for admission.

Grandparents, grandchildren, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, cousins, brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, fiancées or other extended family members are not considered to be close relationships, according to the guidelines that were issued in a cable sent to all U.S. embassies and consulates late on Wednesday. The

new rules take effect on Thursday, according to the cable, which was obtained by The Associated Press.

On Monday, the Supreme Court partially lifted lower court injunctions against Trump's executive order that had temporarily banned visas for citizens of the six countries. The justices' ruling exempted applicants from the ban if they could prove a "bona fide relationship" with a U.S. person or entity, but the court offered only broad guidelines — suggesting they would include a relative, job offer or invitation to lecture in the U.S. — as to how that should be defined.

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