

‘Let Obamacare fail,’ Trump declares as GOP plan collapses

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump declared Tuesday it’s time to “let Obamacare fail” after the latest GOP health care plan crashed and burned in the Senate, a stunning failure for the president, Republican leader Mitch McConnell and a party that has vowed for years to abolish the law.

In a head-spinning series of developments, rank-and-file Republican senators turned on McConnell and Trump for the third time in a row, denying the votes to move forward with a plan for a straight-up repeal of “Obamacare.” This time, it was three GOP women — Susan Collins of Maine, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, and Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia — who delivered the death blow.

All had been shut out of McConnell’s initial all-male working group on health care.

McConnell, who could afford to lose only two votes in the narrowly divided Senate, had turned to the repeal-only bill after his earlier repeal-and-replace measure was rejected on Monday. That had followed the failure of an earlier version of the bill last month.

The successive defeats made clear that despite seven years of promises to repeal former President Barack Obama’s Affordable Care Act, Republicans apparently cannot deliver. Nonetheless, McConnell insisted he would move forward with a vote on his measure to repeal the law, effective in two years, with a promise to work — along with Democrats — to replace it in the meantime.

The vote to move ahead to the bill will take place early next week, McConnell announced late Tuesday. It appears doomed to fail, but GOP leaders want to put lawmakers on record on the issue and move on.

At the White House, Trump appeared to recognize defeat, at least for the moment, while insisting he bore none of the blame.

“I think we’re probably in that position where we’ll just let Obamacare fail,” the president said. “We’re not going to own it. I’m not going to own it. I can tell you that the Republicans are not going to own it. We’ll let Obamacare fail and then the Democrats are going to come to us and they’re going to say, ‘How do we fix it?’”

White House press secretary Sean Spicer said Tuesday night that all GOP senators have been invited to the White



AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster
Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Ky., center, joined by, from left, Sen. Cory Gardner, R-Colo., Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyo., Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., and Senate Majority Whip John Cornyn of Texas, speaks during a news conference on Capitol Hill Tuesday.

House tomorrow for lunch to discuss the way forward on health care.

Despite the current law’s problems, most health care experts do not believe it is at immediate risk of outright failure, and Democratic cooperation to adjust the law is far from assured.

Nor does it appear likely that Republicans can escape owning the problems with the law and the health care system overall, now that they control the House, Senate and White House, partly on the strength of campaigning against the law.

“They seem to have this notion that they can be a majority party, and have control of the White House, and not be responsible for bringing down the health care system,” said Democratic Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois. “It doesn’t work that way.”

Asked how he would justify the GOP’s failure on health care to voters, McConnell responded: “Well, we have a new Supreme Court justice” — suggesting inaction on health care would be forgiven because of that success along with some regulatory roll-backs.

As the day began Tuesday, McConnell was hunting for votes to open debate on a revived version of legislation Congress sent to Obama’s desk in 2015 that would have repealed major portions of Obamacare, with a two-year delay built in. He had turned

to that approach after getting stunned Monday night by defections by Sens. Mike Lee of Utah and Jerry Moran of Kansas on a repeal-and-replace bill.

Many Republicans support the repeal-only approach, and they questioned how senators who voted for the legislation two years ago could oppose it now.

“We’re going to find out if there’s hypocrisy in the United States Senate in the next few days I’m afraid,” said Sen. David Perdue, R-Georgia.

But for others, the implications were too severe now that the bill could actually become law with a Republican president in the White House ready to sign it. The Congressional Budget Office has estimated that more than 30 million people would lose insurance over a decade under the legislation.

Collins voted against the legislation in 2015 while Murkowski and Capito both supported it. Murkowski told reporters Tuesday that repealing the Affordable Care Act without the promise of a replacement would cause uncertainty and chaos.

“To just say repeal and ‘Trust us, we’re going to fix it in a couple of years,’ that’s not going to provide comfort to the anxiety that a lot of Alaskan families are feeling right now,” she said.

Said Capito: “I did not come to Washington to hurt people.”

BRIEFLY

Trump had second conversation with Putin in Germany

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump had another, previously undisclosed conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin at a summit in Germany this month.

White House spokesman Sean Spicer and National Security Council spokesman Michael Anton confirmed that Trump and Putin spoke at a dinner for world leaders and their spouses at the Group of 20 summit in Hamburg, Germany.

The conversation came hours after Trump and Putin’s first official face-to-face meeting on July 7, which was originally scheduled to last just half an hour but stretched on for more than two. The two world leaders were also captured on video shaking hands and exchanging a few words after they arrived at the G-20 summit that day.

Anton would not specify the duration of the conversation. But he said the discussion was casual and should not be characterized as a “meeting.”

“A conversation over dessert should not be characterized as a meeting,” he said.

The dinner, hosted by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, was open only to world leaders and their spouses, as well as one translator per couple, according to a senior White House official who described the event on condition of anonymity.

The official stressed that Trump spoke with many leaders over the course of the dinner and said he spoke briefly with Putin, who was seated next to first lady Melania Trump, as the event was concluding. Trump spoke with Putin using Russia’s translator, since the American translator did not speak Russian.

But Ian Bremmer, who

said he spoke with two people who attended the dinner, said that Trump and Putin spoke for nearly an hour while sitting among the other world leaders and their spouses at the dinner. Bremmer is a foreign affairs columnist and the president of the Eurasia Group, a consulting firm.

Attendees described the meeting as startling, said Bremmer, who was told Trump was very animated as he spoke with Putin.

Trump to nominate Huntsman as U.S. ambassador to Russia

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump announced his intention Tuesday to nominate former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman to be U.S. ambassador to Russia.

If confirmed, the former 2012 GOP presidential candidate would take over a high-profile post amid ongoing investigations into Russian meddling in the 2016 election and potential contacts between Russian officials and the Trump campaign.

Huntsman has twice served as an ambassador. He was the nation’s top diplomat to Singapore under President George H.W. Bush and then served in that role in China under President Barack Obama before returning to the U.S. to run for president.

Huntsman was also under consideration to be Trump’s secretary of state.

The former governor, a Mormon, had an up-and-down relationship with Trump during last year’s campaign. He was slow to endorse any candidate for the Republican nomination though he did back Trump once he became the presumptive nominee. But Huntsman then called for Trump to drop out after the October release of a 2005 video in which Trump was captured on a hot microphone making lewd comments about women.



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