

Ted Cruz Has a Plan to Fix the Senate Health Care Bill

U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, wants to be a “yes” vote on the Better Care Reconciliation Act, but he just can’t get there without some changes to the bill.

But rather than just complain about it, he put his ideas to paper in the form of the Consumer Freedom Amendment. In short, the amendment would still allow existing Obamacare plans to be sold, but also allows insurers to provide lower-premium plans that do not include the so-called “essential health benefits” required by Obamacare.

With more and more Republicans souring on the BCRA following the Congressional Budget Office “score” that suggests it would remove 22 million Americans from the health insurance marketplace, Cruz said he believes his idea will encourage more to stay on and stop the implosion of the individual health insurance market. In a lengthy statement, he said:

Four months ago, I joined with a group of five other senators with very different perspectives on health care policy—representative of the full spectrum of the Republican Party—for the sole purpose of working together to fulfill our commitment to voters to reduce premiums and provide better, more affordable health care. Over time, this group expanded to include committee chairs, Senate leadership and then the entire conference. We carefully deliberated, with the common goal of crafting a bill that can pass and that actually fixes the problems Obamacare has wrought.

While I have not yet had the opportunity to fully review the draft legislative text itself, there are components that give me encouragement and there are also components

that are a cause for deep concern.

I am encouraged that the bill would expand association health plans, so those in individual or small group markets can join together in large groups to get lower rates. I am also pleased that the bill would make at least some progress in reining in the long-term growth of Medicaid. These are two inclusions that I have been fighting for since the beginning of our discussions. Finally, I am glad that this retains the provisions previously passed by Congress to prevent taxpayer dollars from funding organizations that perform abortions.

However, as currently drafted, this bill draft does not do nearly enough to lower premiums. That should be the central issue for Republicans—repealing Obamacare and making health care more affordable. Because of this, I cannot support it as currently drafted, and I do not believe it has the votes to pass the Senate.

But it is important to remember that what was released [by the Senate Republican Conference] was only a draft. I am hopeful that as we openly debate this legislation, real improvements will be made prior to floor consideration so that we can pass a bill that provides the relief from Obamacare that Republicans have repeatedly promised the last seven years.

Specifically, we should do more to ensure consumers have the freedom to choose among more affordable plans that are tailored for their individual health care needs. We should allow consumers to purchase insurance across state lines and create a true 50-state marketplace, driving down costs for everyone. We should expand health savings accounts so that consumers can pay health insurance premiums on a pre-tax basis. We should incentivize states to cap punitive damages in medical malpractice lawsuits to further reduce the cost of health care.

Finally, we should provide real flexibility for Medicaid, so states can design creative and innovative ways to provide care for our most vulnerable. I have strongly advocated for these proposals to this point and will continue to do so going forward.

I want to get to yes, but this first draft doesn't get the job done. Over the next week and beyond, I will continue working to bring Republicans together to honor our promise, repeal Obamacare and adopt common-sense, consensus reforms that can actually be passed into law.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., has vowed there will be a vote on the bill before the Fourth of July holiday break. {eo}