

The GOP Senate Is a Bizarre World

Late Tuesday afternoon, the Senate voted to take up debate on repealing and replacing Obamacare—the vote was 51 to 50, with two Republican Senators—Maine’s Susan Collins and Alaska’s Lisa Murkowski—opposing the motion.

The vote was saved by the return of Senator John McCain, sidelined by surgery that revealed brain cancer, and a tie-breaking vote cast by Vice President Mike Pence.

Keep in mind this wasn’t a vote on a bill, this was a vote to agree to talk about a bill.

That Collins would oppose the motion was no surprise as she had voted against the bill that is likely to be brought up when it first came before the Senate back in 2015.

Murkowski—who backed the Senate bill repealing Obamacare in 2015 that was vetoed by then-President Barack Obama—flip-flopped and said, according to Fox News, that the Senate should “take a step back and engage in a bipartisan process to address the failures of [Obamacare] and stabilize the individual markets.”

This is code for “don’t cut my state’s Medicaid expansion money,” because every objective observer we know of has said that the individual markets are in a death spiral due to Obamacare’s uneconomic mandates and actuarially flawed business model.

In a bizarre foreshadowing of the “don’t cut my Medicaid” argument, *The Washington Post* reported that former Speaker of the House John Boehner told a business gathering last week that Republicans are “not going to repeal and replace Obamacare” because “the American people have gotten accustomed

to it.”

“Here we are, seven months into this year, and yet they’ve not passed this bill. Now, they’re never—they’re not going to repeal and replace Obamacare,” Boehner told a private crowd in Las Vegas, according to video footage obtained by *The Washington Post*. “It’s been around too long. And the American people have gotten accustomed to it. Governors have gotten accustomed to this Medicaid expansion, and so trying to pull it back is really not going to work.”

However, Medicaid itself is also in what might as well be termed a “death spiral”, with 74,059,221 people now enrolled in Medicaid due to its expansion, to the point that, in the District of Columbia, it is covering people at 221 percent of the federal poverty level.

Total Medicaid outlays in Federal fiscal year 2015 amounted to \$553.8 billion and increased by 11.6 percent between 2014 and 2015. This was the fastest growth in more than a decade, due primarily to the Medicaid eligibility expansion under the Affordable Care Act.

Federal Medicaid outlays in 2015 were \$349.8 billion and grew 16 percent over the previous year, in large part due to the Medicaid eligibility expansion. Federal outlays represented 63 percent of total spending on the program. State and local governments’ outlays were \$204 billion, which constituted 37 percent of total program costs.

It is safe to say that any federal program growing at 16 percent a year, when the deficit continues to mount despite record tax collections, is unsustainable—or is at least unsustainable to taxpayers.

But the idea that two Republican Senators should hold up the repeal and replacement of Obamacare over funding for an unsustainable program that serves 137,596 people in Alaska and 269,510 people in Maine isn’t the most bizarre aspect of this

process.

The most bizarre thing is that perpetual maverick Senator John McCain said one of the most sensible things about the Obamacare repeal uttered on the Senate Floor during the debate about whether to debate: "Let's return to regular order."

A big part of the problem with the Obamacare repeal process in both the House and the Senate is that the bills have been written behind closed doors by the two smartest guys in the world: Speaker Paul Ryan and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell.

And then the two smartest guys in the world have presented the bills to the Republican majorities on a take it or leave it basis.

To their great surprise a lot of Republicans chose to leave it.

We'd like to see the 2015 repeal bill pass the Senate so that it can go to conference with the House, but if it doesn't, then we're going to have to allow that, for once, Senator John McCain is right. The Republican leadership is going to have to stop acting like the smartest guys in the world and let the Republican Majorities in the House and the Senate do what we elected them to do: craft legislation. {eo}

This article was originally published at . Used with permission.