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Written by **Warren Mass** on January 12, 2017

Senate Passes First Step To Repeal ObamaCare, Rand Paul Goes His Own Way

During a late-night Senate session on January 11 in which debate lasted for seven hours, the Senate voted 51-48 after 1:00 a.m. on Thursday morning to approve a budget resolution that would dismantle the Affordable Care Act — popularly known as ObamaCare. While the vote was largely on partisan lines, Rand Paul (R-Ky.) voted against the resolution and Dianne Feinstein (D-Cal.) was absent.

Paul, following in the footsteps of his constitutionalist father, former Representative Ron Paul (R-Texas), provided an explanation for his vote that indicated his independent way of considering legislation that did not always fit neat, partisan pigeonholes:

> As a physician, I cannot wait to repeal ObamaCare and replace it with a health care system that relies on freedom to provide quality, comprehensive, and affordable care.

> But putting nearly $10 trillion more in debt on the American people's backs through a budget that never balances is not the way to get there. It is the exact opposite of the change Republicans promised, and I cannot support it, even as a placeholder.

Following the vote, Senate Budget Chairman Mike Enzi (R-Wy.) predicted a positive outcome: "This resolution will set the stage for true legislative relief from ObamaCare that Americans have long demanded while ensuring a stable transition. The ObamaCare bridge is collapsing and we're sending in a rescue team."

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Given the partisan nature of ObamaCare, Democrats naturally defended the plan against any changes and predicted dire consequences.

"I think it's important for this country to know this was not a usual thing, this is a day which lays the groundwork for 30 million people to be thrown off their health insurance," said Bernie Sanders of Vermont, an Independent who caucuses with Democrats. "And if that happens, many of these people will die."

"We wanted to say no matter how late, we're going to stay and fight and represent our constituents — there are so many constituencies who will be hurt by this repeal without a replace," said Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.).

Sanders' and Schumer's predictions ignored the fact that President-elect Donald Trump has promised to replace ObamaCare with another plan immediately after it is repealed so no one would be left without health insurance.

Just five days before the Senate vote, on January 6, Paul received a phone call from Trump indicating that the president-elect was pleased with remarks Paul had made about the best approach to repealing and replacing ObamaCare.

"He called after seeing an interview that I had done [talking about] that we should vote on ObamaCare replacement at the same time," Paul said in an interview on January 9 quoted by *Politico*. "He said he was in complete agreement with that."

The *Politico* article noted that Paul had waged a week-long campaign to hold a vote that would replace ObamaCare and pass a simultaneous repeal measure. However, this approach was at odds with Republican plans to hold an immediate vote to gut the healthcare law. Paul outlined his plan to repeal and replace the healthcare law:

> We need to work through the discussion. I think there are enough voices in the caucus that are saying we should do replacement when we repeal. So it could get to that point. I still would but I'd feel a lot better about it if we voted on replacement on the same day.

Paul added that he would still likely support a stand-alone repeal bill, but the resolution just passed by the Senate was apparently not what he had in mind.

Even before the vote on the resolution on the 12th, there was an apparent difference of opinion between Paul and his colleague from Kentucky, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, concerning the timetable for repealing and replacing ObamaCare.

The *Politico* report cited McConnell's statement on CBS that he hadn't "heard Senator Paul's plan to replace it. But we will be replacing it rapidly after repealing it." When asked twice to elaborate on his proposed timetable, McConnell would only say that replacement would happen "quickly."

After McConnell visited Trump Tower on January 9, he told reporters that he had talked to Trump about "repealing and replacing ObamaCare."

Reince Priebus, Trump's incoming chief of staff, said on *Face the Nation* that "The full replacement may take more time than an instantaneous action."

However, Paul's account of what Trump told him during the January 6 call differed. "I'd hate to characterize [Trump's] opinion on it other than he agreed with me that we should do it that at the same time," Paul said. "There is momentum growing for it."

The simultaneous repeal-and-replace timetable could still come about, assuming that is what Trump prefers and he exerts his influence with the Republican leadership in Congress. The Senate's budget resolution was not legislation, but a "statement of intent" that will prompt congressional committees to begin crafting a second bill that would roll back major parts of ObamaCare. The House is expected to concur with the resolution.

Considering that Paul evidently has Trump's ear on the subject, his dissent may serve as a noteworthy reminder to his Republican colleagues that they must exercise fiscal restraint in their attempts to undo the disastrous Obama programs.

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