



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on August 26, 2013

GOP Leaders Won't Use Budget Battle to Defund ObamaCare

Despite pressure from conservatives — including over a third of the House Republican caucus — Republican congressional leaders have indicated that they have no intention of using upcoming budget negotiations to defund ObamaCare.

“There is little enthusiasm among Republican leaders on Capitol Hill for the campaign, led most publicly by Senator Ted Cruz [R-Texas], to defund parts of Obamacare in the continuing resolution [CR] that would fund the government beginning October 1,” reported the [Weekly Standard](#).



October 1, coincidentally, is the day open enrollment in ObamaCare's insurance exchanges is set to commence. The exchanges are the means by which Americans without employer-sponsored health insurance are supposed to meet the individual mandate's requirements.

“Our intent is to move quickly on a short-term continuing resolution that keeps the government running and maintains current sequester spending levels,” House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio, shown) reportedly told his fellow House Republicans during an August 22 conference call.

Boehner did not specifically address the matter of defunding ObamaCare via the CR, but a source who was on the call told [National Review](#), “He didn't rule it out, but indicated to members that defund through CR is not the best strategy.”

Republican leaders fear that a standoff with the White House over ObamaCare would lead to a shutdown of the federal government for which Republicans would be blamed. That is what happened the last time the government shut down, in the mid-1990s, helping to propel President Bill Clinton to reelection.

The GOP rank and file, on the other hand, consider ObamaCare so dangerous that many are willing to take that risk. [Eighty](#) of 233 House Republicans have signed a letter circulated by Rep. Mark Meadows (R-N.C.) urging Boehner “to affirmatively de-fund the implementation of and enforcement of Obamacare in any relevant appropriations bill,” including “any continuing appropriations bill.” And despite pressure from Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), 14 GOP senators have affixed their John Hancocks to a letter by Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah) stating that they “will not support any continuing resolution or appropriations legislation that funds further implementation or enforcement of Obamacare.”

Cruz, one of the cosigners of Lee's letter, is also [touring the country](#) in an effort to drum up support for defunding ObamaCare. In an appearance in Dallas, Texas, Cruz argued that Republicans can “win this fight” by passing a CR that funds everything the government does except ObamaCare. Then, when President Barack Obama and other Democrats blame the Republicans for threatening to shut down the government, Cruz said, Republicans need to “stand up” and tell the American people, “Look, we don't



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want to shut the government down. We have voted to fund the government.... Why is President Obama threatening to shut the government down to force ObamaCare?"

"That," Cruz declared, "is an argument we can win."

It appears that Cruz has not yet convinced congressional leaders that they can win, however. Boehner wants to make the CR solely about budget sequestration.

"The president is desperate to get rid of the sequester ... so desperate that he says he'll shut down the government if Congress follows the law and funds the government at the levels his sequester mandates," he said on the conference call. "The president's threat to shut down the government if we implement his sequester is not a defensible position.... Until the president agrees to better cuts and reforms that help grow the economy and put us on path to a balanced budget, his sequester — the sequester he himself proposed, insisted on, and signed into law — stays in place."

If the CR isn't the place to stage a showdown over ObamaCare, what is? As far as Boehner is concerned, the best strategy is "to keep holding votes that chip away at the legislative coalition the president is using to force Obamacare on the nation." But if there is to be an attempt at defunding the healthcare law, it will probably occur during fall negotiations over an increase in the debt ceiling.

According to the [Washington Post](#):

Senior GOP aides confirmed that House leaders are considering making demands related to the health initiative as part of any agreement for raising the \$16.7 trillion federal debt limit.

"Obamacare is one of many things we can pursue on debt limit," a leadership aide said Thursday, speaking on the condition of anonymity.

Among the possibilities: delaying the mandate that requires individuals to purchase insurance beginning in January and codifying Obama's own decision to delay penalties for businesses that fail to offer insurance to their workers next year.

However, the aide said, "This is all in the discussion phase right now."

Of course, one would hardly consider it much of a victory to saddle future taxpayers with even more debt in exchange for delaying or temporarily defunding ObamaCare, yet even such a Pyrrhic victory is far from certain given GOP leaders' unwillingness to commit to defunding.

This skittishness seems particularly odd in light of the fact that (1) the law's implementation is clearly in trouble and (2) poll after poll finds that the American people do not like the law and want it to be overhauled or repealed. The *Weekly Standard* observed:

In some respects, including Obamacare in the negotiations this fall is a fight Republicans win just by having it. Much of the reporting out of Washington in coming weeks will focus on the struggle over the budget and the debt ceiling. By adding Obamacare to that debate, Republicans will force the White House — and vulnerable Democrats in Congress — to defend the law at precisely the time they'd like to avoid it. Even if Republicans "lose" in this scenario — if Obama refuses to consider delaying any more of Obamacare — at a minimum they will have bought leverage for other parts of the negotiation and provided voters with a clear reminder of who owns the coming chaos.

Nevertheless, GOP leaders seem to have little fight left in them when it comes to ObamaCare, leaving them open to charges of weakness or duplicity.

Talk show host [Mark Levin](#), never one to mince words, called Boehner "a snake," "absolutely



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dishonest,” and “pathetic and incompetent.” Levin said Boehner’s position is that “not only are we surrendering [on other issues], we are not going to support a vote to stand up to ObamaCare.”

[ConservativeHQ.com](#) was likewise skeptical of Boehner’s commitment to defunding and questioned his strategy of using the CR only to preserve sequestration.

“We find it difficult to understand the difference between a government shutdown created by a budget battle over the sequester spending levels and a budget battle over Obamacare funding — the National Parks close and all the other things establishment Republicans whinge [sic] about happen either way,” the website argued.

Furthermore, it said, Boehner’s unwillingness to use the CR to defund ObamaCare “means that the Speaker’s record of folding whenever the opportunity arises to actually use the one weapon the Constitution bestows upon Congress to rein-in the executive branch of government remains intact.”

As much as that remark might sting, however, it pales in comparison to Levin’s suggestion. If House leaders fail to dry up ObamaCare’s funding, the radio talker said, the law should be given a new moniker: “BoehnerCare.”

Photo of Speaker of the House John Boehner (R-Ohio): AP Images



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