



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on July 30, 2013

Will Republicans Risk a Government Shutdown to Defund ObamaCare?

The next step in the implementation of ObamaCare — open enrollment in state insurance exchanges — begins on October 1. Coincidentally, that is the same day that the federal government will run out of operating funds unless Congress passes a continuing resolution (CR) to keep it running. And some congressional Republicans are hoping to take advantage of this confluence of events to starve the healthcare law to death, even if it means risking a government shutdown.



Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas), for instance, has introduced an amendment to the CR currently under consideration that would cut off all funding for ObamaCare.

“If we want to stop this train wreck from hitting hard-working American families, the time to do so is now,” Cruz told Fox News Channel’s [Special Report](#). Otherwise, he argued, “it will remain with us forever.”

As of this writing, Cruz’s amendment has 29 cosponsors, including the three highest-ranking GOP senators: Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (Ky.), Senate Republican Whip John Cornyn (Texas), and Senate Republican Conference chairman John Thune (S.D.).

Of course, any of these cosponsors could eventually vote for the CR even if the amendment fails. “For Cruz’s effort to have teeth,” observed [FreedomWorks](#), “the Republican senators must all be committed to absolutely refusing to vote for any spending bill that contains funding for ObamaCare.”

To that end, Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah) is asking his colleagues to join him in signing a [letter](#) to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) stating that they will not support any legislation that funds ObamaCare.

“This is the last stop before ObamaCare fully kicks in on January 1 of next year for us to refuse to fund it,” Lee told [Fox and Friends](#).

“If Republicans in both houses simply refuse to vote for any continuing resolution that contains further funding for further enforcement of ObamaCare, we can stop it. We can stop the individual mandate from going into effect,” he said.

In fact, it’s even simpler than that.

“All appropriations must start in the House, which means that a simple majority of this body *by itself* could arrest many of these disturbing developments [e.g., ObamaCare] simply by marshaling the courage and determination to just say ‘no’ by pulling the purse strings shut,” [Rep. Tom McClintock \(R-Calif.\)](#) said on the floor of the House of Representatives. “If we fail to do so, I believe that we are allowing our nation to drift dangerously toward a constitutional crisis with grave implications to the rule of law and to the survival of American liberty.” (Emphasis added.)

More than 60 House Republicans have signed a letter to House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) asking



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him not to bring any bills that would fund ObamaCare to the floor, and some have declared flatly that they will not vote for any such legislation.

“ObamaCare today is destroying jobs and our economy, and we must get rid of it,” said Rep. Paul Broun (R-Ga.). “We must repeal ObamaCare, and that’s the bottom line. We must defund it. We’re going to have one shot to do so, and that’s in the continuing resolution, and I will not vote for a continuing resolution that continues to fund ObamaCare.”

Not all Republicans are convinced of the wisdom of this approach. The leadership in both houses, various other old-guard politicians, and even some budget hawks have been either noncommittal or actively opposed to what they view as holding the CR hostage to an unachievable objective.

Referring to ObamaCare, Boehner said, “We will continue to do everything we can to defund it, to repeal it and to make sure that the American people aren’t put through this horrific experience.” But when pressed by [CNSNews.com](#) as to whether “everything” includes using the CR to dry up the funds, Boehner merely replied, “We have not made any decisions about how we’re going to deal with the CR.”

This, among other reasons, is why [Rep. Michele Bachmann \(R-Minn.\)](#) recently wondered aloud whether House Republicans “have the guts to fight” ObamaCare.

The CR battle “is our last big effort,” she declared. “Can we do it? Yeah, it’s possible, but I think the signals I’m reading out of the Republican leadership to me aren’t encouraging.”

In the upper house, Sen. Richard Burr (R-N.C.) told Public Radio International that using the CR to defund ObamaCare is “the dumbest idea I’ve ever heard of.”

Burr is concerned that an impasse over the CR will lead to a government shutdown, which he experienced as a congressman in 1995. Most of the blame for the shutdown was attached to congressional Republicans, which may have contributed to President Bill Clinton’s reelection the next year.

“Some of these guys need to understand that if you shut down the federal government, you’d better have a specific reason to do it that’s achievable,” Burr elaborated. “Defunding the Affordable Care Act is not achievable through shutting down the federal government.”

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) told talk show host Michael Medved that threatening to shut down the government is a bad idea because “most Americans are really tired of those kinds of shenanigans here in Washington.”

Sen. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.), too, spoke out against the possibility of a government shutdown.

“You’re going to set an expectation among the conservatives in our party that we can achieve something that we’re not able to achieve,” Coburn told the [Washington Examiner](#). “It’s not an achievable strategy. It’s creating the false impression that you can do something when you can’t. And it’s dishonest.”

“You’re not going to stop the funding, but what you will do is shut down the government,” Coburn said. That strategy, he averred, “is a good way for Republicans to lose the House.”

Lee, however, has [pointed out](#) repeatedly that he’s not seeking to shut down the government. He wants Congress to offer President Barack Obama a CR that funds everything except ObamaCare and see if Obama is willing to take the blame for shutting down the government over a law that his administration has, by its actions, admitted is “not ready for prime time.”



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Lee's superiors in the Senate do not, unfortunately, see things that way. While publicly remaining mum on his position on Lee's letter, McConnell is privately opposed to it and has been working to convince other senators not to sign it — or even to withdraw their signatures if they have already signed it, according to the [Weekly Standard](#).

The magazine reports that McConnell's behind-the-scenes efforts have been successful. Of the 17 senators who had signed Lee's letter, five — four of whom are cosponsoring Cruz's amendment — asked for their signatures to be removed: Sens. Kelly Ayotte (R-N.H.), John Boozman (R-Ariz.), Cornyn, Mark Kirk (R-Ill.), and Roger Wicker (R-Miss.). (Thune remains a cosigner.)

Staunch ObamaCare opponents consider the battle to defund the law a defining moment for Republicans, separating those who merely talk about repealing the healthcare law (and perhaps vote for symbolic repeal bills) from those who are serious about saving America from socialized medicine.

As Matt Hoskins, executive director of the Senate Conservatives Fund, told [The Hill](#): "Any Republican who votes to give Obama a single penny to implement ObamaCare is part of the problem and should be defeated."

Photo of U.S. Capitol



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