

THE HILL



July 3, 2017

Senate Republicans must lean into health bill

By: Alfredo Ortiz

Senate Republicans are spending their Fourth of July weekend trying to overcome the Congressional Budget Office's prediction that their proposed healthcare reform bill would cause 22 million Americans to lose health insurance.

But tweaking the bill as Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) is currently trying to do won't change the media narrative that the plan is heartless. To generate the support necessary for the bill to pass, they need to attack the CBO's credibility and lean in to their plan, pointing out how it will help the vast majority of Americans struggling under the Affordable Care Act's price increases and choice reductions.

To accomplish this, Republicans should first point out the CBO has no credibility when it comes to healthcare coverage predictions. To wit: As recently as 2015, the CBO estimated the ACA would cover 24 million people on the individual market by 2017. The actual number today is half that — 12 million. It also predicted in 2013 that 34 million people would be on Medicaid in 2016. The actual number: 75 million. These are just a couple of examples of dozens to choose from where the CBO has been way off base in its coverage predictions.

Republicans should highlight the CBO's positive finding buried by the media that their plan would reduce average premiums by nearly one-third. This would provide much needed relief to middle-class Americans squeezed by healthcare costs. In fact, according to a recent Monmouth poll, healthcare costs are now American families' biggest concern.

Because of the ACA's regulations, taxes, and mandates, the cost of care has skyrocketed. The average Bronze plan's annual deductible is now \$12,400, with average family premiums at \$6,000. A new Health and Human Services report shows premiums in the individual market have doubled since 2013,

the year before the ACA took effect. For many healthy middle class families, these inflated costs are worse than having no insurance at all.

By getting rid of regulations such as essential health benefit mandates that force consumers to pay for services they don't want or need, as well as getting rid of taxes such as the health insurance tax that is passed onto consumers in the form of higher premiums, the Republican plan would provide more choices at lower prices. Expanded tax credits and health savings accounts would help consumers purchase them. This dynamic could create more insured people in the country — not less — even if it's not reflected in the CBO's Excel spreadsheet.

Finally, Republicans should point out that the coverage gains under the ACA were almost entirely a result of Medicaid expansion. In fact, the ACA caused roughly 10 million Americans to lose their preferred insurance, with millions getting cancellation letters in the mail saying their current policies were no longer compliant. But Medicaid's current growth trajectory — now covering one-quarter of all Americans and half of all births — is unsustainable and its viability for the most vulnerable is threatened. Reining in this program as the Republican plan seeks to do would protect the Medicaid safety net for its originally intended recipients: the poor and disabled.

Senate Republicans must lean in to their plan if they hope it to pass. Attacking the CBO's credibility while explaining how their plan would reduce prices, increase choice, and strengthen the safety net is a good place to start.

Alfredo Ortiz is the president and CEO of the Job Creators Network, which was founded by entrepreneurs like Home Depot co-founder Bernie Marcus.