

Long is attacked, praised for opposing GOP Obamacare bill

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(Photo: Deirdre Shesgreen)

WASHINGTON — Rep. Billy Long is getting some political love from progressive groups — and some grief from conservatives ones — in the wake of [his decision to oppose](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2017/05/01/long-oppose-new-gop-obamacare-replacement-bill/101170056/) a revised Republican bill to repeal and replace Obamacare.

It's an odd situation for the staunch Springfield Republican, who rarely strays from the GOP party line. And it highlights just how fraught the health care debate has become, with Republicans in Congress under immense pressure from constituents and advocacy groups as they determine the fate of the 2010 Affordable Care Act.

"Billy Long's Obamacare Flip-Flop," blared the subject line of an email Tuesday from the Club for Growth, a powerful conservative group. In a statement, the group's president, David McIntosh, noted that Long had repeatedly voted in favor of previous bills to repeal Obamacare.

"... But now, when it counts, and President Trump is ready to sign the bill, Billy has flip-flopped to defend Obamacare," McIntosh said. He accused Long of using "liberal talking points to distort the truth."

Meanwhile, a liberal group, Missouri Health Care for All, called Long's opposition to the Republican proposal "wonderful."

In what might be a first, the group praised Long for "his leadership" and urged the rest of the Missouri delegation to "follow his example of putting constituents before politics."

All the attention came after Long announced on Monday that he would vote "no" on the GOP bill, saying it would gut protections for patients with pre-existing conditions.

The GOP proposal would repeal some elements of Obamacare and allow states to opt out of other provisions, such as a requirement that insurers cover maternity care, substance abuse, and other health services. The bill also would unravel the ACA's prohibition on charging higher premiums to patients with pre-existing conditions.

As GOP leaders scramble to secure votes, most of the attention so far has been on Republican moderates who fear the bill would cause millions of individuals to lose their insurance.

Long is not a moderate; the American Conservative Union, another GOP-leaning group, gave him a 92 percent rating for his votes in 2016. He is normally a GOP team player, and a big Trump supporter, so his defection was a surprise. And it came as a blow to GOP leaders who appear to be short of the votes they need to win House passage of the bill.

Long's spokeswoman did not respond to a request for comment on Tuesday. But in an interview on Monday, Long insisted that he'd always supported Obamacare's protections for people with pre-existing conditions.

The new bill "strips away any guarantee that people with pre-existing conditions could be covered at an affordable rate," Long told the News-Leader, calling that "unacceptable."

[Republicans still don't know whether they have enough votes to pass Obamacare repeal](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2017/05/02/republican-obamacare-repeal-bill-fred-upton/101200696/)

[Long to oppose new GOP Obamacare replacement bill](http://www.news-leader.com/story/news/politics/2017/05/01/long-oppose-new-gop-obamacare-replacement-bill/101170056/)

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