

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Geoff Garin and Guy Molyneux
DATE: March 6, 2017
RE: The Republicans are losing ground on healthcare, and it's likely to get worse for them

Our newly completed national survey among a representative cross section of voters shows that a large majority of those who are paying the most attention to the healthcare debate have an unfavorable opinion of the Republican effort to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act. Among the broader electorate, congressional Republicans are losing independent voters on the healthcare issue by a wide margin. At the rank-and-file level, the intensity of opposition to the GOP repeal-and-replace effort among Democratic voters far exceeds the intensity of support for it among Republican voters.

More than two thirds of voters want to keep what works in the Affordable Care Act and fix what doesn't, rather than repeal and replace the current law.

The problems of congressional Republicans on healthcare are likely to deepen, as the survey results show they are on the wrong side of public opinion on Medicaid. Two-thirds of all voters have a favorable opinion of Medicaid, and by wide margins they oppose large cuts in funding for Medicaid and limiting the amount of Medicaid funding states receive from the federal government. By 58% to 22%, voters say they would be less likely to support their senator or congressperson for reelection if he or she voted for the plan to turn Medicaid into a block grant and make large cuts in federal funding for Medicaid.

These results are based on 1,057 interviews conducted online February 25-28 with respondents who voted in the 2016 presidential election. The party identification of voters in this sample is 42% Republican and 42% Democrat, and the self-reported presidential vote among respondents is 48% for Clinton and 46% for Trump.

A more detailed discussion of the findings follows.

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1. Currently, 46% of voters say they have heard a lot about the efforts of Republicans in Congress to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, while 37% say they have heard some about it and 17% say they have heard just a little or nothing at all about it.
2. Among the near-majority of the electorate who have heard the most about it, opinions about the GOP effort to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act are unfavorable by a margin of 55% to 43%.
3. Among the electorate as whole, opinions about the GOP repeal-and-replace policy are more unfavorable than favorable by 49% to 44%, with substantially greater intensity among those who are negative (34% very unfavorable) than among those who are positive (18% very favorable).
4. Independent voters are unfavorable to the GOP repeal-and-replace plan by a wide margin of 57% to 31%. Just 33% of Republican voters say they have a very favorable opinion of the GOP's repeal-and-replace effort – far fewer than the 62% of Democrats who are very unfavorable.
5. A large majority of voters do not accept the underlining premise of the Republicans' drive to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act. Fully 68% favor keeping what works in the Affordable Care Act and fixing what doesn't, while just 32% prefer repealing the Affordable Care Act and replacing it with a new healthcare law. Nine of ten Democrats, eight of ten independents, and four in ten Republicans want to keep and fix the Affordable Care Act rather than repeal and replace it.
6. By 66% to 28%, voters nationwide express a favorable opinion of Medicaid, while 8% say they do not know enough about it to express an opinion. People who voted for Donald Trump are favorable to Medicaid by 54% to 39%, suggesting GOP efforts to cut Medicaid as part of their healthcare repeal could alienate a significant part of the Trump base.

7. By 60% to 40%, voters are unfavorable to the Republican proposal to turn Medicaid into a block grant program¹ and make large cuts in federal funding for Medicaid – including 37% who are very unfavorable, and just 14% who are very favorable. Even with a partisan cue embedded in the question (i.e., it is clearly described as a Republican proposal), 30% of rank-and-file Republican voters and 33% of Trump voters are unfavorable to the GOP plan to block grant and cut Medicaid.
8. By 55% to 45%, voters find the GOP's rationale for its Medicaid policy (emphasizing the need to reduce costs, promote innovation, and eliminate restrictive federal requirements) to be unconvincing.²
9. Even after hearing the GOP's rationale for its policy, 58% of voters say they would be less likely to support their senator or congressperson for reelection if he or she voted for the plan to turn Medicaid into a block grant and make large cuts in federal funding for Medicaid; only 22% say this would make them more likely to reelect their senator or congressperson.
 - Independents say by 72% to 9% that they would be less likely to reelect someone who voted to block grant and cut Medicaid.
 - The potential net change of votes by party is a significant loser for a Republican incumbent who favors the GOP plan – they would pick up only 7% of Democrats, but lose 29% of Republicans.

¹ This is how we explained the block grant concept: “Republicans in Congress are proposing to place a cap or limit on the amount of money states receive in Medicaid funding from the federal government each year, regardless of the cost of providing healthcare to those who qualify. This is referred to as turning Medicaid into a block grant program.”

² Respondents were given the following statement: Supporters of the Republican Medicaid proposal say it is necessary to make major changes in Medicaid because the cost of the program is increasing at a high rate and on its current path Medicaid is not sustainable fiscally. Turning Medicaid into a block grant and eliminating restrictive federal requirements means that states will be free to innovate and experiment to find new ways to meet essential healthcare needs in a fiscally responsible way. States will have more incentive to eliminate waste, fraud, and abuse from their Medicaid programs, and if necessary, they can prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable groups instead of paying to give healthcare to able-bodied people.