

Replacing Obamacare is a make-or-break moment for Republicans

By [Hugh Hewitt](#) June 25 at 8:11 PM

Sen. Dean Heller (R-Nev.) threw himself off a political cliff last week when he declared full-throated opposition to the Senate version of the Obamacare repeal bill, and it remains to be seen if Heller is hanging by a limb out of sight and can climb back to electoral sanity or has hit rock bottom in his public career.

Individual Senate Republicans face different political realities, but the caucus must somehow get the votes necessary to return the revised Obamacare “repeal and replace” bill to the House. To fail to do so is to condemn not only Heller and Arizona’s Sen. Jeff Flake to certain doom but probably others among the eight GOP senators up for reelection. The grass roots’ disgust with this betrayal will be so deep as to endanger every senator, even in deep red states such as Mississippi, Texas and Utah.

The political crosswinds and upheavals in the country are already beyond predicting anything, so to add even more cause for grievance by betraying the central promise of the congressional GOP is beyond irresponsible. It is political insanity. Shut the door to the consultants, and throw out the polling senators. If the GOP defaults on its core promise, it is doomed as a party to minority status, probably as early as 2018 and certainly in 2020.

To fail this week almost certainly forfeits the House majority in next year’s midterm elections but perhaps also the Senate’s, and with the latter, the ability to confirm Supreme Court justices and lower court judges, pass budgets under reconciliation, have any chance at serious tax reform and of course approve the crucial repeal of the Defense Department sequestration.

This is of course an imperative vote on saving American health care. Next year, for example, there potentially will be at least 18 counties in Ohio without even a single option for an individuals seeking coverage. The swaths of America where there is only one provider are large and growing. “Choice for consumers” is a delusion, and soaring deductibles have made health care an illusion to millions more.

Obamacare is a catastrophe on its own terms, but the consequences of not passing its repeal are worse even beyond those awful health-care outcomes. It will forfeit every other Republican goal because failing to deliver on the central promise of eight years

of debates and campaigns will shatter the credibility every Republican, not just those who block the bill. The party as a whole will be gravely wounded, perhaps beyond healing for a generation or more.

I don't have to guess about this. I have been talking to the center-right of the country for three hours a day Monday through Friday for the past 17 years. I know the central argument of the conservative activists everywhere in the United States is that *Beltway Republicans cannot be trusted to do anything hard*. That argument was dented by the discipline with which the GOP put up with the mainstream media and Democrats' slings and arrows in the fight over replacing Justice Antonin Scalia. Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (Ky.) rightly calculated that to surrender that hill would be to lose not just a political battle but the political war stretching long into the future. It was that big of a deal to the base.

The same is true of Obamacare. To vote "no" on whatever compromise arrives is to express contempt for the Republican Party as a whole – and its grass-roots activists and base voters – and for those ideas it stands for on all major matters, from a strong defense to low taxes to an originalist Supreme Court.

Thus Heller seemed to declare himself a hollow man when he said he could not vote for it, a man without any core beliefs because with his rambling statement he endangered all alleged core GOP beliefs, and thus the GOP will not support him. It isn't about primaries; primary opponents need not materialize. It is about millions of conservatives who will simply give up on politics.

This is a make-or-break moment for Senate Republicans and the party itself. Sadly, for this conservative, the tone-deafness of Heller may not be unique. It may not even turn out to be particularly rare. We will know in a week. And not one GOP senator will be able to say he or she wasn't warned.

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