

Congressional Budget Office Should Not Be a Target for Attack

Republican responses to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) finding that 24 million Americans will lose health insurance coverage under their plan revealed deep divisions among congressional Republicans about how best to proceed on health care. These divisions remain on display today as Republicans scramble to make changes to the American Health Care Act (AHCA) in a last-minute effort to pick up votes.

The challenge in uniting Republicans behind the AHCA is illustrated in their statements about the CBO score. Republicans have responded in one of two ways:

- 1) Acknowledging that taking health care away from 24 million Americans is not workable; or
- 2) Calling into question CBO's numbers even though CBO has consistently outperformed other forecasters.

Acknowledging Faults

Some Republicans appear to realize that a bill that takes health insurance away from millions of Americans and cuts support for working families is not a good direction for the country.

Senator Cassidy (LA): “Can’t sugarcoat it. Doesn’t look good. The CBO score was, shall we say, an eye-popper.”

Senator Cornyn (TX): “We expect to do better.”

Senator Portman (OH): “I’m concerned about the Medicaid population. That’s the biggest part of the coverage for Ohio.”

Senator Gardner (CO): “We’ve got work to do here.”

Senator Hatch (UT): “Naturally I’m concerned.”

Senator Daines (MT): “We need to do better.”

Senator Collins (ME): “This is not a bill I could support in its current form. It really misses the mark.”

Representative Lance (NJ-07): “The CBO score has modified the dynamics.”

Representative Ros-Lehtinen (FL-27): “...too many of my constituents will lose insurance and there will be less funds to help the poor and elderly with their healthcare.”

Representative Wittmann (VA-01): “After reviewing this legislation and receiving the Congressional Budget Office score today, it is clear that this bill is not consistent with the repeal and replace principles for which I stand. I do not think this bill will do what is

necessary for the short and long-term best interests of Virginians and therefore, I must oppose it.”

Attacking CBO

But some senior members of the Trump Administration appear to have decided that the right political strategy is to imply that CBO’s analysis is flawed. As Senator Graham (SC) [said](#), “We like the CBO when they agree with us. When they don’t, they’re a bunch of losers.”

Office of Management and Budget Director [Mick Mulvaney](#): “I don’t believe the facts are correct. I’m not just saying that because it looks bad for my political position. I’m say that based upon a track record of the CBO being wrong before and we believe the CBO is wrong now.”

Health and Human Services Secretary [Tom Price](#): “We disagree strenuously with the report that was put out. It’s just not believable is what we would suggest.”

Representative [Joe Barton](#) (TX-06): “But the CBO — one of the things you can always say is whatever the CBO says they are going to be wrong.”

Representative [Greg Walden](#) (OR-02): “The Congressional Budget Office has not yet analyzed our entire proposal to repeal and replace Obamacare, and today’s score reflects only a portion of the actions we will take to roll back red tape, free markets, and empower consumers.”

Representative [Michael Burgess](#) (TX-26): “The Congressional Budget Office score...is hardly the final word on the issue.”

Representative [David Brat](#) (VA-07): “The CBO, they’ve scored everything wrong for decades.”

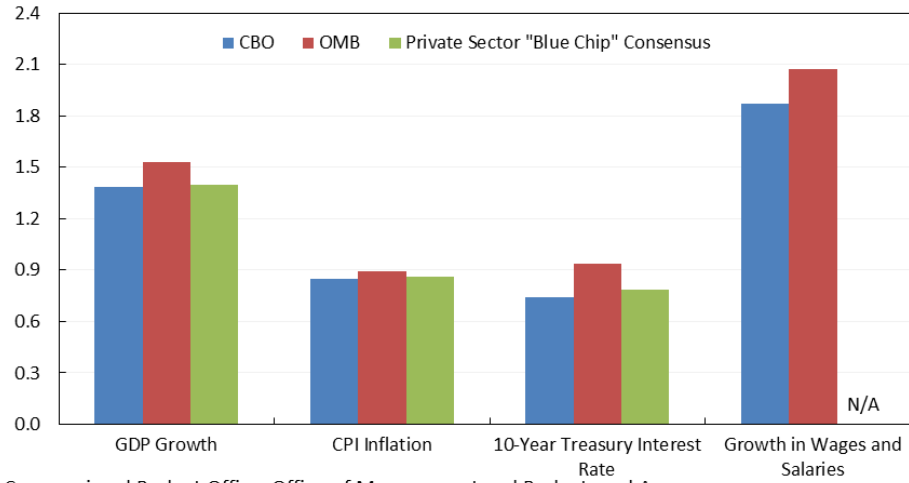
Representative [Glenn Thompson](#) (PA-05): “To tell you the truth, the CBO, I don’t see where they get it right...I don’t have a lot of confidence in the CBO process...Trust me, this bill will be subject to all kinds of alternative analysis.”

The truth is that despite their attempts to discredit the CBO analysis, the Trump Administration’s own estimate [appears](#) to show that 26 million people, two million more than in the CBO analysis, would lose health insurance under the Republican plan.

CBO scoring has received bipartisan support, is reputable and has consistently outperformed other forecasters.

CBO Forecasts Consistently Outperform the President's OMB, Private Forecasters

Average Forecast Error



Congressional Budget Office, Office of Management and Budget, and Aspen Publishers, Blue Chip Economic Indicators. A lower score means forecasts track closer to actual performance

*Measured as root mean squared forecast error.

Attacking the Congressional Budget Office is not a substitute for making good policy.