

Baker, Markey lead bipartisan resistance to Senate health care bill

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BOSTON — Gov. Charlie Baker cautioned that a health care bill proposed by U.S. Senate Republicans would cost 264,000 residents their health coverage in Massachusetts and have a cumulative negative impact of more than \$8.2 billion on the state by 2025, while Sen. Edward Markey described defeating the bill as the legislative fight of his life.

In a letter to the state's all-Democrat Congressional delegation, Baker, a Republican, wrote that the bill would "increasingly strain the state's fiscal resources, result in greater numbers of individuals without insurance and destabilize the commercial insurance market." He separately joined Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe in urging the Senate to give state officials more time to review the bill before it is brought to the floor for a pivotal vote.

"I'm disappointed by the conversation that's apparently taking place at the federal level," Baker told reporters Monday afternoon. "I'm disappointed because it's not bipartisan, I'm disappointed because there doesn't seem to be a lot of interest in focusing on the things that would actually fix the many things that Republicans and Democrats both agree are wrong with the Affordable Care Act, and I'm extremely worried about what the consequences for hundreds of thousands of people here in the commonwealth of Mass. would be if something like the Senate bill were to pass."

Baker spoke about an hour before the Congressional Budget Office and Joint Committee on Taxation released their estimate of the bill, which they said would reduce the federal deficit by \$321 billion by 2026, while increasing the number of people uninsured by 22 million over the same time period. The largest savings, according to the estimate, would come from reductions in outlays for Medicaid.

Baker said in his letter to the delegation that Massachusetts would lose \$907 million in 2020, rising to \$1.7 billion in 2024. He said the people who would lose coverage "are among our

lowest-income residents” and that a series of proposed changes to the insurance market exchanges would “make it increasingly difficult for low income residents to purchase affordable health care plans.”

Senate Republicans released a revised version of their bill Monday, which they say is intended to help stabilize insurance markets, give states “more flexibility” on Medicaid, remove mandates instituted by President Barack Obama’s Affordable Care Act, and make health insurance more affordable.

Markey, who railed against the bill during a press conference with advocates for people with disabilities at his Boston office, said it would not improve upon Obamacare or make it easier for people to afford care. Instead, he said, it would be a “death sentence” for “the sick, the elderly, for the disabled, for those suffering with opioid addiction,” reducing both the availability of services for those populations and the quality of care.

“This bill is a mean-spirited, cruel and inhuman and immoral document which hurts the poorest, those most in need, those sickest to give a tax break to the wealthiest in our country, and I am going to go to Washington to fight this bill as hard as I have ever fought any bill in my life,” said Markey, who was elected to the U.S. House in 1976 and the Senate in 2013. “Nothing is as important as defeating this legislation.”

Markey said Democrats were not invited to collaborate on the bill, which he estimated would mean “a minimum of \$20 billion is taken out of the Massachusetts health care system for Medicaid coverage.”

The bill is expected to be debated later this week, and Markey, a Malden Democrat, said there is still disagreement among Republicans, with some thinking its cuts “aren’t deep enough” while others believe “programs have been slashed too much.”

“They’re about to undergo an X-ray of the soul of the Republican party, to determine whether or not it has a heart, whether or not it is going to take care of those who are most in need,” Markey said. “It is a decision that the Republican party must now confront.”

Baker and McAuliffe, a Democrat who chairs of the National Governors Association, on Monday asked Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell to ensure that governors have “adequate time to determine the impact any health care bill will have on their states and residents, and ensure that the bill does not adversely harm the people we were elected to serve.”

The proposal has been a target of criticism from within Massachusetts.

Tom Sannicandro, a former state representative from Ashland who is now the director of the UMass Boston Institute for Community Inclusion, said his 33-year-old son with Down Syndrome is among the 33,000 Massachusetts residents with intellectual and developmental disabilities who would be affected by the legislation.

“This is a civil rights issue for people with disabilities,” he said at Markey’s press conference.

At the U.S. Conference of Mayors in Miami, Boston Mayor Martin Walsh said the bill would strip health care “from seniors, low-income individuals, individuals with disabilities, and children that rely on Medicaid.” John Erwin of the [Conference of Boston Teaching Hospitals](#) said it would “destabilize the health care marketplace and cripple the Medicaid program while placing unsustainable financial pressure on states and providers.”

Gina Scaramella, executive director of the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center, said in a statement that the Senate proposal “would result in serious harm to survivors of sexual violence,” by allowing states to offer plans that do not include coverage for preventative health care services and mental health care.

U.S. Rep. Stephen Lynch told Boston Herald Radio on June 23 that Democrats are “desperate to fix” the Affordable Care Act to rein in unsustainable rising costs, but Republicans are desperate “just to get rid of Obamacare.” He said the bills House and Senate Republicans have put forward do not lower the costs of care, but shift the cost to states instead of the federal government.

“We’ve got to find a way to lower the costs so that we can do what we originally planned, which is to provide universal health care to everyone,” he said.