

After defeat of Obamacare repeal, Democrats offer a helping hand to Trump administration

Patrick Martin
28 March 2017

At his Monday afternoon press briefing, the first question asked of White House spokesman Sean Spicer was, “Is the president serious about working with Democrats going forward after what happened with health care?” And Spicer replied, at some length, in the affirmative.

The question and answer concerned the process that is developing behind the scenes in Washington, with top Democrats giving signals that they are prepared to work with Trump in implementing a further attack on health care and handing out a massive tax cut to the rich.

President Trump and Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer signaled their openness to bipartisan collaboration within minutes of the decision last Friday by the White House and House Republican leaders to scrap a planned vote to repeal Obamacare. The American Health Care Act, as the repeal bill was titled, was doomed by opposition within the Republican caucus, mainly from those demanding an even more reactionary assault on health care.

Trump responded with typical vituperation, directed at both the ultra-right House Freedom Caucus, and the Democrats, who had pledged to vote unanimously against the repeal of Obamacare. But he soon changed his tune, suggesting that a bipartisan deal on health care was now possible. “I think that’s going to happen,” he said Friday. “I’d be totally open to it.” Schumer responded in kind, saying that Democrats were open to such a deal, provided it unfolded based on “fixing” Obamacare rather than its outright repeal.

By Sunday, the Trump approach to the Democrats “had the look of a coordinated effort,” as the *Washington Post* put it. Trump tweeted out more insults directed at the Freedom Caucus, while Chief of Staff Reince Priebus appeared on Fox News Sunday to offer another olive branch to the nominal opposition party. “It would be nice to get the Democrats on board,” he said. “I think that

Democrats can come to the table as well.” Priebus cited Trump’s declaration that “Perhaps it’s time for us to start talking to some moderate Democrats as well and come up with, you know, a bipartisan solution.”

Schumer again responded positively. “We have ideas, they have ideas, to try to improve Obamacare,” he told ABC News on Sunday. “We never said it was perfect. We always said we’d work with them to improve it.” He warned that Trump would “lose again” on other policy proposals, such as tax cuts, if he chose a Republicans-only legislative posture. Working with the Democrats, Schumer said, “he could have a different presidency.”

An even more effusive response came from Senator Bernie Sanders, who cited Trump’s campaign demagoguery about health care costs as a potential point of agreement. Appearing on CNN’s “State of the Union” program, the erstwhile critic of the “billionaire class” suggested an alliance with the billionaire president. “One of the things he talked about was lowering the cost of prescription drugs,” Sanders said. “There is wonderful legislation right now in the Senate to do that. President Trump, come on board. Let’s work together.”

This was the context for Spicer’s declaration on Monday afternoon.

Any agreement between the congressional Democrats and the Republican White House on Obamacare “reform” would have nothing to do with guaranteeing access to health care. The starting point would be the fact, as many observers noted, that Obama’s ACA and Paul Ryan’s ACHA have the same structure, preserving the profit-driven, corporate-controlled basis of the health care system, and shifting the cost of health care from employers and the government to working people, while using government subsidies and tax credits to bolster the finances of the insurance companies.

On the next major issue coming before Congress, Trump’s plan for a huge tax cut for the wealthy and for

US corporations, there is ample room for a bipartisan deal between the two major capitalist parties. The Obama administration repeatedly advanced such a measure. Schumer has the closest ties with Wall Street—he has collected more campaign cash from the financial industry than any other non-presidential candidate—and the Democratic Party has a long history of cutting pro-corporate tax deals with Republican presidents, from Ronald Reagan to George W. Bush.

The gestures by the Democrats towards conciliation with Trump explode the fiction that there is a fundamental conflict between the Democrats and Republicans on health care, economic policy, or domestic policy as a whole. As soon as the initial shock of Trump's surprise election victory was over, Schumer & Co. were looking for potential points of agreement with the president-elect, citing the potential for a bipartisan deal on infrastructure spending, which would represent no genuine effort to rebuild crumbling cities, schools, roads and utilities, but another tax handout to giant corporations and the wealthy.

The outgoing Democratic president declared the elections no more than an “intramural scrimmage” involving players on the same team—perhaps the most honest statement Barack Obama made in eight years in office. As Trump assembled his cabinet of billionaires, generals and ultra-right ideologues—with the fascist Steven K. Bannon as top White House adviser—the Democrats laid low, and the US Senate rubber-stamped nearly every cabinet nominee.

There are, of course, obstacles in the path of bipartisan deal-making, particularly the campaign spearheaded by the Democratic Party and the sections of the media, portraying Trump's election as the byproduct of Russian government intervention in the 2016 elections. These attacks express the opposition of the military-intelligence apparatus, acting through its political allies, to any turn away from the policy of escalating military, economic and political pressure on Russia, which poses the danger of a direct military confrontation between the states that possess the bulk of the world's nuclear weapons.

The Trump White House appears to be seeking to accommodate this pressure for a more intransigent anti-Russian policy. It was notable that Spicer chose to begin his press briefing Monday by citing the official State Department statement denouncing the arrest of anti-government protesters in Russia over the weekend, demanding the release of all those arrested and using language that suggested a change in government, not just a change in policy, was needed in Russia.

Beyond disputes over domestic and foreign policy, there is a more fundamental reason, however, for a turn by Trump and the Democrats towards bipartisan collaboration. The US ruling elite as a whole, and both its parties, sense the growth of popular dissatisfaction and anger, directed against the political establishment as a whole. The latest Gallup poll showed Trump at his lowest public standing since taking office, with only 36 percent approval, and 57 percent disapproving. His health care legislation had only 17 percent support.

Congressional town hall meetings over the past two months have been frequently tense affairs, with anger directed not only at Republican representatives supporting Trump, but against Democratic representatives who have done nothing to oppose him. And among the broader masses who would never be seen at a congressional town hall meeting, the hatred of the ruling elite is even deeper.

As time-tested defenders of capitalism and the financial aristocracy, the Democratic Party senses the growing popular discontent and the potential for social upheaval, particularly in the event of new economic shocks, or new military disasters in the Middle East and elsewhere.

The struggle against the Trump administration and its program of militarism and social reaction must be carried out in complete opposition to the Democratic Party. The right-wing policies of the Democratic Party paved the way for Trump, the Democrats are perfectly willing to collaborate with Trump, and if they were returned to power the Democrats would expand war abroad and the assault on the working class and democratic rights at home.

The working class must build an independent political party of its own, based on a socialist and antiwar program, and opposed to both the parties of American big business.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact