

## GOP Changes its Tune on Crafting Bills in Secret

By Karen Tumulty

WASHINGTON - Hypocrisy has always been a vital lubricant to making the gears turn in Washington. Give politicians some power and a job to get done, and they quickly forget their righteous critiques of the seamy practices they denounced when the other side was running things.

Rarely, however, has the double standard been so flagrant as now, when Republicans are scrambling to keep their promise to “repeal and replace Obamacare.”

Exhibit A: Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., who is set to produce a draft of a bill to be voted on next week.

Back when the Affordable Care Act passed on a party-line vote in 2010, the then-minority leader was full-throated in his denunciation of “the partisan route” that majority Democrats had taken and of the “closed-door sweetheart deals that were made to gain the slimmest margin for passage of a bill that’s about their health care.”

If Republicans got back in control, McConnell vowed in 2014, “there’s not a chance” they would act as Democrats did.

But that earlier process - which also included many months of committee hearings and bipartisan negotiation - was as transparent as a fish tank compared with the drafting of a health-care bill that is taking place privately in McConnell’s

office, largely with a small cadre of aides. The leader himself has acknowledged it is a “Republicans-only exercise.”

Senate GOP leaders argue that they have held more than a dozen closed-door listening sessions in which members have had the chance to learn about policy options and share their opinions. But members and staff say privately that those conversations haven’t included any specific details of what leaders plan to put in a final bill.

Many in McConnell’s own party are grumbling publicly.

“I would like a more open process. That’s for sure,” said Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, who added that she cannot commit to a position on the legislation because she has no idea what

is in it.

“We used to complain like hell when the Democrats ran the Affordable Care Act. Now, we’re doing the same thing,” said Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz.

McConnell, however, is far from the only Republican who seems to suffer from a sudden case of amnesia.

Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price has expressed no qualms about the way Republicans are putting together their bill on Capitol Hill.

But back on Jan. 14, 2010, when he was a Republican congressman from Georgia, Price tweeted: “With Democrats discussing health care in secret, they’re sacrificing the trust of the Ame-

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President Donald Trump speaks with Sen. Mitch McConnell, left, and House Speaker Paul D. Ryan, R-Wis., at the White House on June 6. MUST CREDIT: Washington Post photo by Jabin Botsford