



Rep. John Faso and his colleagues who supported the ill-fated bill took a "huge political risk" and will be coming home to "a lot of angry voters," said Karen Scharff, executive director of Citizen Action. | AP Photo

## State's GOP House delegation could face backlash over AHCA

By **JOSEFA VELASQUEZ** | 03/29/17 05:15 AM EDT

ALBANY — Liberal activists in the Hudson Valley cheered when a House vote on the American Health Care Act was canceled last week because it didn't have enough support. Now, those activists are trying to figure out how to use the momentum they've gained to challenge some members of the state's Republican delegation who supported the failed attempt to repeal and replace Obamacare.

"The voters in their districts know very well that they were going to lose out under the GOP plan and that's why there was such a public outcry," said Karen Scharff, executive director of Citizen Action. She said that Rep. John Faso, who represents the Hudson Valley, and his colleagues who supported the ill-fated bill took a "huge political risk" and will be coming

home to "a lot of angry voters."

But Faso and others who supported the AHCA weren't the only Republicans who took a risk. Those who said they would vote against the bill may also feel some heat back home. Conservative Party chairman Mike Long said that Reps. Dan Donovan of Staten Island and John Katko, who represents Central New York, could be vulnerable to a challenge from the right because they declined to support Republican plan.

"I do believe that all members could be held accountable because Obamacare could not be repealed," Long said. "Because of their public positions, Congressmen Katko and Donovan ... could set themselves up as a larger target."

Even though the mid-term election is roughly a year and a half away, political strategists and advocates already are making plans and recruiting candidates. For example, Jessica Wisneski, the legislative and campaigns director for Citizen Action, told POLITICO New York that potential challengers to Faso are "already coming" forward.

Several other members of New York's Republican Congressional delegation voiced their support for the bill, including Claudia Tenney, Tom Reed, and Lee Zeldin. But none were as vocal as Faso and Rep. Chris Collins, who together pushed an amendment to the AHCA that would have shifted the local cost of Medicaid to the state, arguing that it would lower property taxes. The proposed amendment drew the ire of Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who said it would be "devastating" to the state.

According to Gerald Benjamin, a professor of political science at the State University of New York at New Paltz and a longtime political observer, Faso came out a "winner" on the health care debate, fulfilling a campaign promise to cut property taxes.

"He did in his district what he said he would do and at the end of the day he demonstrated a certain toughness," Benjamin said, noting that the freshman from Kinderhook "took on the governor."

In an email, Faso said he would "leave it to others to to interpret the politics of the AHCA."

"As I have said, it is critical for lawmakers from both parties to find incremental improvements and reforms to the [Affordable Care Act] which will lower costs and increase healthcare access for all Americans," Faso added.

As for Katko, he could be vulnerable on his right given that Republican primary voters in upstate New York tend to be more conservative, Benjamin said.

If repeal of Obamacare doesn't happen by the next election cycle, Long said, Republican members of Congress across the country would be in jeopardy for having failed to deliver on a promise.

Reps. Peter King of Long Island and Elise Stefanik of the North Country never said how they'd vote, making it harder for adversaries to pin them down on a position.

"There's no way to nail her down on the record," Benjamin said of Stefanik. "She was the most risk adverse and I don't think that she pays any price for that."