

FRIDAY, JULY 15, 2016—17:20

Republican Party lays out platform for Election 2016

Susan Jaffe

Editor's note. Susan Jaffe reports from this week from the Republican Party's platform committee meeting. The health provisions of the Democrats' platform will be featured next week.

Several delegates said they don't expect the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, Donald Trump, to agree with every point and that's OK.

"With Mr. Trump, on a lot of these issues, he's with us," said Melody Potter, a member of the Republican National Committee from Charleston, West Virginia. "We know for a fact that Hillary Clinton is not with us."

Potter, who was on the healthcare, education, and crime subcommittee, said the "very conservative" platform helps define her party for American voters.

"The Republican Party stands for something," she said. "We have to draw a sharp contrast between our principles and the progressive, liberal, Marxist principles of the Democrats."

Reporters attending the platform committee meetings this week were not allowed to see copies of the roughly 50-page document delegates discussed. But some delegates were willing to mention some health care provisions.

One section promises that a Republican president, on the first day in office, will halt the programs created by the Affordable Care Act and then sign legislation passed by congressional Republicans to repeal it.

However, the platform would retain the law's requirement that health insurers sell coverage to people with pre-existing health problems, said Darcie Johnston from Vermont.

The platform also focuses on religious freedom and health care, assuring that medical professionals would not have to provide services, such as abortion, that conflicted with their religious faith. Other provisions would affirm the

constitutional right to life of the unborn, and call for a permanent ban on federal funding and subsidies for abortion and health insurance policies, including Obamacare, the insurance program set up by the Affordable Care Act.

During the health subcommittee meeting, delegates were eager to restrict what they believed were the most objectionable parts of the law. "I thought we are repealing Obamacare," its chairwoman, Carolyn McLarty of Oklahoma, reminded the group.

The platform would also prohibit the use of taxpayers' money to fund organizations, like Planned Parenthood that delegates said "sell aborted baby body parts."

Eric Brakey, a state lawmaker from Maine, proposed an amendment which was approved that would give the terminally ill a "right to try" investigational drugs not approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). It can take FDA 10 years to approve some medications, and that's too long for dying patients, he said.

Although the platform recognizes the role of government and private investment in biomedical research, delegates said the document does not specifically call for increasing federal funding for the National Institutes of Health.

"Medical research is important," the platform committee chairman, US Sen. John Barrasso of Wyoming, who is also a physician, said during a short break. "I would like to see it in the platform." It should include a "call for additional focus on medical research," he said, but did not provide details before calling the committee back to order.

Republican party officials said the platform would be available to the public after it is approved at next week's convention which begins next week. They did not expect convention delegates to make changes, despite a fledgling effort to replace it with a two-page statement of principles.

