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G.O.P. Maps Out Waves of Attacks Over Health Law

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WASHINGTON — The memo distributed to House Republicans this week was concise and blunt, listing talking points and marching orders: “Because of Obamacare, I Lost My Insurance.” “Obamacare Increases Health Care Costs.” “The Exchanges May Not Be Secure, Putting Personal Information at Risk.” “Continue Collecting Constituent Stories.”

The [document](#), the product of a series of closed-door strategy sessions that began in mid-October, is part of an increasingly organized Republican attack on the Affordable Care Act, President Obama’s signature legislative initiative. Republican strategists say that over the next several months, they intend to keep Democrats on their heels through a multilayered, sequenced assault.

The idea is to gather stories of people affected by the health care law — through social media, letters from constituents, or meetings during visits back home — and use them to open a line of attack, keep it going until it enters the public discourse and forces a response, then quickly pivot to the next topic.

For a House more used to disarray than methodical game plans, the success so far has been something of a surprise, even to the campaign’s organizers.

“Yeah, there is a method being followed here,” said Representative Michael C. Burgess, a Texas Republican involved in the effort, “but, really, these stories are creating themselves.”

First it was the malfunctioning website, [HealthCare.gov](#), then millions of insurance policy cancellation notices sent to individuals with plans that did not meet the requirements of the health law. Earlier this week, the House aired allegations that personal data is insecure on the Internet-based insurance exchanges.

At a congressional field hearing set for Friday in Gastonia, N.C., the line of attack will shift to rate shocks expected to jolt the insurance markets in the next two years. Coming soon: a push to highlight people losing access to their longtime physicians and changes in Medicare Advantage programs for older people.

The effort has its roots in a strategy developed last spring, when House Republican leaders — plagued by party divisions that were thwarting legislative accomplishments — refocused the House's committees on oversight rather than on the development of new policies.

Rob Borden, a general counsel to Representative Darrell Issa of California, the chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, moved to a newly created position that reported jointly to Speaker John A. Boehner and Representative Eric Cantor of Virginia, the majority leader. Mr. Borden's task was to coordinate and monitor oversight activities across separate committees to make sure they are not overlapping or undercutting one another.

That aggressive campaign, which produced numerous hearings on the attacks in Benghazi, Libya, as well as on I.R.S. scrutiny of conservative groups, is now increasingly consumed by the health care fight. House Republican leaders empowered four committees — oversight, Ways and Means, Energy and Commerce, and Education and the Workforce — to take the lead, with support from other panels, such as the Science and Homeland Security Committees, which have examined computer security.

Mr. Cantor and Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers of Washington, another member of the Republican leadership, have also leaned on all 231 House Republicans. A 17-page "House Republican Playbook" walks members through "messaging tools" like talking points, social media tactics and "digital fliers"; details lines of attack; offers up a sample opinion article for local newspapers; and provides an extensive timeline on the health care law and an exhaustive list of legislative responses that have gone nowhere.

A message of the week is presented to the Republican members at the beginning of each week, Ms. McMorris Rodgers said. A "Call to Action" email chain

distributes relevant breaking news. A new website, gop.gov/yourstory, is collecting anecdotes from each member.

The goal, according to Ms. McMorris Rodgers, is to use all the “Republican voices we have in the House, the media markets in all the districts we represent, to take our message all over the country.”

“It penetrates,” she said. “It’s powerful.”

To Democrats, especially in the White House, the power of the effort stems from using anecdotes to paint a fundamentally misleading picture.

“There’s been so much noise and so much misinformation, and this incredible organized effort to block the notion that everybody should have affordable health care in this country,” President Obama told supporters of the health care law this month, “that I think it’s important for us to step back and take a look at what’s already been accomplished, because a lot of times it doesn’t make news. Controversies make news.”

Republicans have gone to the floor of the House and the Senate to tell constituent stories of soaring premiums or yawning new deductibles. But on Wednesday, the White House Council of Economic Advisers released a report showing that health care spending had grown by 1.3 percent since 2010, the year the health care law passed. That is the lowest rate on record for any three-year period and less than a third of the average since 1965, according to the White House.

Jason Furman, the council’s chairman, said much of that slowdown was attributable to structural changes in the health care economy ushered in by the health law, such as accountable care organizations, which band general practitioners, specialists and hospitals together to plan out a patient’s care, not play off one another to raise their billing. And insurance premiums on plans offered through the exchanges are [lower than expected](#).

Congressional Democrats are trying to use such information and their own anecdotes to counter Republican attacks. Under the rubric of “This Is Obamacare” — [with its own website](#) of the same name, created by the Democratic National Committee — Democrats have been sharing “Affordable

Care Act success stories” of ailing constituents getting health coverage for the first time, people being allowed to keep their adult children on their insurance, or consumers finding markedly cheaper insurance plans on the exchanges.

But Republicans are already looking ahead to next year, when they expect a raft of new issues as people start using their new health plans.

“We’re trying to stay as agile as we can,” said Brendan Buck, a spokesman for Mr. Boehner. “We know what issues are coming. We know what the consequences will be. We can’t say when they will pop exactly, but we’re prepared to talk about them.”

Four House Republicans will host Google hangouts on Thursday, employing social media to troll for stories from their constituents.

Representative John Shimkus, Republican of Illinois, who will host a hangout on Thursday with Representative Fred Upton of Michigan, the chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee, said the hangout appeared on his calendar with no warning from the leadership. He ran into Mr. Upton on Wednesday morning and confessed his surprise.

“He said, ‘Hey, we’re going to do that thing tomorrow,’ and I said, ‘Yeah, I’ve never done one before,’ and he said, ‘Neither have I,’ ” Mr. Shimkus said, laughing. “I’m not that hip, but I guess I’m getting there.”