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## How New Zealand's Millennial Artists are Confronting Generational Stigma

LL

**LANA LOPESI**

Sep 21 2017, 6:30am



Model dressed by Clara Chon for Blue Blank at the opening of *The Tomorrow People*, Adam Art Gallery Te Pātaka Toi, Wellington, July 22–October 1, 2017. Photo by Shaun Matthews



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problematic—art-world obsession.

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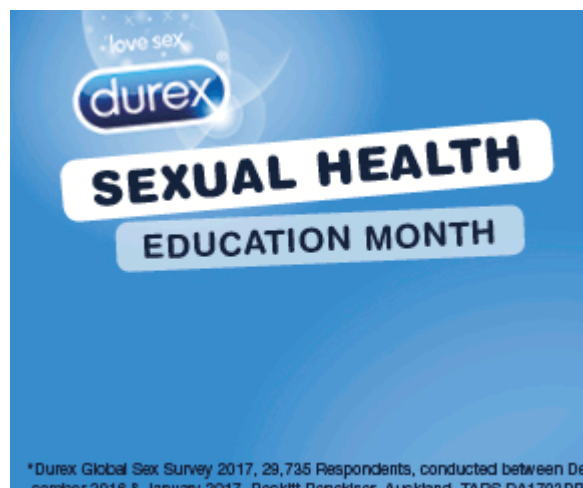
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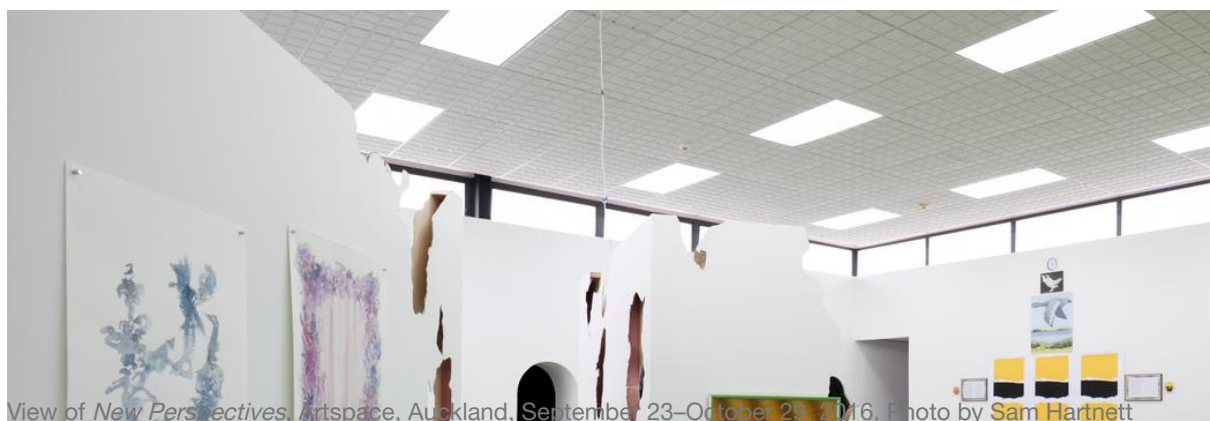
"We can all agree that millennials are the worst." So begins a recent article in *The Wire*, giving unabashed voice to a sentiment that, justified or not, is widely shared. Composed—according to William Strauss and Neil Howe's generational theory—of those born between 1982 and 2004, this much-maligned group is characterized by its witnessing of transformative advances in technology. And in their 2009 book *Millennials Rising*, Strauss and Howe also tag its members as "special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, conventional, pressured, and achieving." It's not difficult to see how this awkward mix of attributes might rub Generation X-ers, and the baby boomers that preceded them, the wrong way. The terms are generalizations, of course, but the term—here as elsewhere—has stuck.

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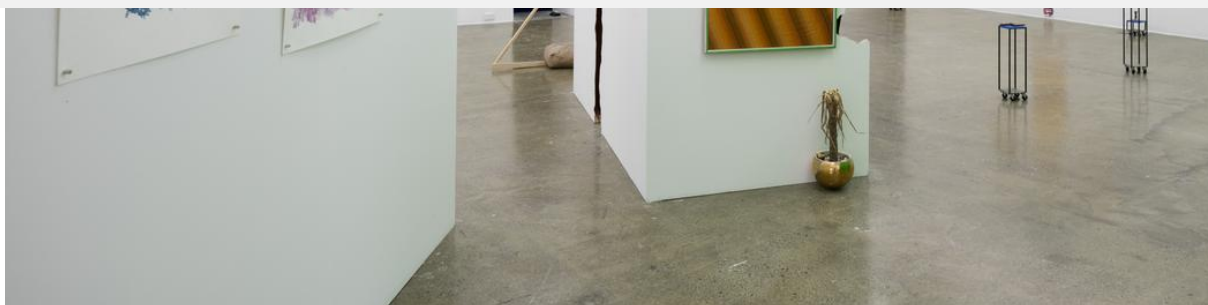


notorious television interview for *60 Minutes Australia*, luxury property developer Tim Gurner (a millennial himself) accused his peers of throwing away their money on overpriced avocado toast, a decadent taste which he suggested was leading directly to their inability to climb the property ladder. Across the ditch, New Zealand is in the midst of a housing crisis; Auckland is now the world's fourth most expensive city for homeownership, with the median price for a house a cool million New Zealand dollars (upwards of \$700,000 USD). Of course, local media jumped on the avocado comment, castigating millennials for their profligacy and overlooking such major problems as inadequate urban planning and extant economic turmoil—not to mention the lack of foresight exhibited, arguably, by previous generations.

The media thrives on labeling people, but so does the art world. Over the past year in Aotearoa New Zealand, we've seen curators jump aboard the millennial gravy train, with a number of recent exhibitions seeking to define how the generation's art looks and feels. The first of these was last fall's *New Perspectives* (September 23–October 29, 2016) at Auckland not-for-profit Artspace, which trumpeted the ambitious, albeit nebulous, intention to "distill a panoramic picture of young artistic research and production in Aotearoa." The 21 artists were selected by the gallery's curatorial team of John Mutambu and Misal Adnan Yıldız with help from Simon Denny, through an open call that attracted 120 proposals. Denny, a New Zealand artist currently based in Berlin, was the country's representative at the 2015 Venice Biennale. He's also, along with Mutambu, a millennial.



View of *New Perspectives*, Artspace, Auckland, September 23–October 29, 2016. Photo by Sam Hartnett



*New Perspectives* was, perhaps predictably, overwhelming, and pushed the gallery's physical capacity to its limits. But it was astutely considered, too. *Metro Magazine* critic Anthony Byrt opined that it showed "just how dangerous and pointless it is to tar an entire generation with a single, vicious brush. At the same time, and somewhat contradictorily, it also makes a bold generational statement." What show and critic alike attempted to survey was how young New Zealand artists were responding to the uncertain state of the wider world. And since the exhibition wrapped, the divisive politics that were beginning to erupt at the time have now surfaced fully; we're in a post-Trump, post-Brexit world teetering on the brink of nuclear conflict. And while we've been to similar places before, the key distinction this time around is the dominance of the Internet. Technological advances have, selectively, democratized space and information, providing a platform to those who were once denied a voice. With the rise in white supremacy and other forms of intolerance, we're also seeing the discourse around people of color, indigenous populations, and LGBTQI rights attaining new visibility.

Unlike *New Perspectives*, *The Tomorrow People* at the Adam Art Gallery in New Zealand's capital, Wellington (July 22–October 1, 2017) benefits from the political changes that occurred in the intervening nine months, focusing on emergent artists who offer "urgent, resourceful, and playful possibilities for navigating troubling times." With a similarly large number of participants—25—the exhibition, curated by Christina Barton, Stephen Cleland, and Simon Gennard, does what the title suggests, looking to define the interests of a rising generation, but through a more traditional curatorial model. The



extant thesis rather than working *with* them to amplify their own visions. Thus it falls on the sword of its own curiosity, any sense of curatorial urgency appearing entirely absent. This unfortunate condition is emphasized by the fact that, as Chloe Geoghegan points out in a review for *The Pantograph Punch*, six *New Perspectives* artists also appear in *The Tomorrow People*—some with the same works.

If we accept the stated interest of *The Tomorrow People* in "navigating troubling times" as common to much current practice, then few artists are better qualified to offer an opinion than Melbourne-based Hamishi Farah. In April 2016, the 25-year-old garnered international media attention while en route from Melbourne to the NADA art fair in New York. Having travelled under the waiver scheme that allows people from member countries such as Australia to stay in the US for up to 90 days without a visa, Farah—an Australian citizen of Somali heritage— was fingerprinted and had his passport and phone confiscated before being handcuffed to the wall of a cell for some 13 hours, eventually being deported without explanation. Farah was interrogated by guards who asked him, bizarrely, whether he was able to produce art without the aid of drugs. "I was mocked by them for being an artist when I tried to explain my story," Farah told Australian daily *The Age*. "They called me an idiot and a prima donna."

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This experience of racial profiling certainly ties in with the aforementioned notion of urgency; so did another exhibition at Artspace, *Dirt Future* (August 4–September 2, 2017), in which Farah also took part. As the gallery's artist in residence, he worked with seven young artists in a mentorship role to confront the question of who speaks for whom. Markedly different from the two previous examples, the resultant show enjoyed further millennial support in the shape of Artspace staffers Bridget Riggir-Cuddy and Cameron Ah Loo-Matamua. The selected "verging on emerging" artists worked with the institution's team on the allocation of time and money, without specific formal expectations. They went on excursions, invested in self-care, and



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endeavor," "bearing witness to histories that manifest through the body," and exploring "the trace of violence as found through self-sovereignty."

Of these three exhibitions, it was, ironically, *Dirt Future* that had the strongest premise. And since its curatorial decisions were made collaboratively, the result at least appeared to express a unified millennial position. While not framed publicly as a "new artists show," its emphasis was on the ongoing investment in its participants, an approach that transcended mere institutional critique to establish a new model, a real attempt at sovereignty by and for a new generation. One result of current political volatility is emboldened artistic practice, in which irony and ambiguity have surrendered ground to more direct strategies. Perhaps painting a generation in broad strokes when it labors under such a heavy inherited social burden, and remains in such a vulnerable position, is counterproductive. Why don't we just let it work?

Lana Lopesi is a writer based in Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa New Zealand. She is Editor-in-Chief of The Pantograph Punch and Contributing Editor for Design Assembly.

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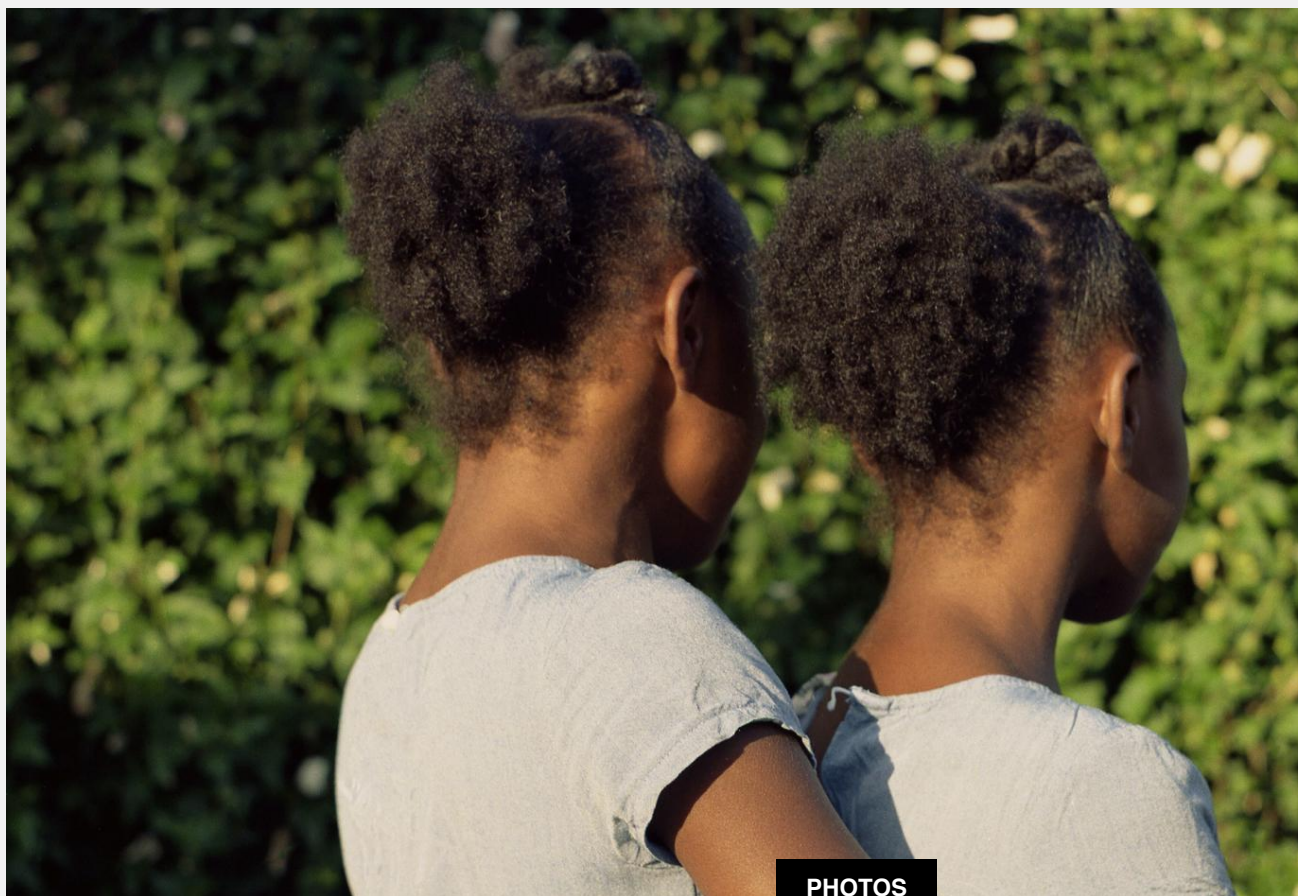


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PHOTOS

## The Future Is Black Femmes



ELIZABETH RENSTROM

Sep 23 2017, 10:00am

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**A new exhibit in New York City celebrates the visual identity of artists from across the African diaspora who present as feminine.**

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*The Future Is (Black) Femme* is a new show at ATYPE, the youth hub on New York's Lower East Side. From [Rochelle Brock](#)'s psychedelic portraits to [Ojima Abalaka](#) and [Jessica Spence](#)'s lighthearted vignettes, the exhibition spans different mediums and black experiences. Though these defiant artists have all led unique experiences within the African diaspora, similar themes of kinship, tenderness, and rejoicing run through all their works. Curated by [Jessica Pettway](#), [Josette Roberts](#), and [Miranda Barnes](#), the exhibition celebrates black femmes, the culture they create, and the communities they foster. I spoke with co-curator Jessica Pettway on her motivations for this show:

**VICE: Why is it important to highlight these artists now?**

**Jessica Pettway:** Authentic representation is important in a time when it seems like those with power want to do everything possible to erase us. Our culture is constantly appropriated for profit and people outside of our communities are often called upon to tell our stories. It felt necessary to create an opportunity to celebrate and represent our unique experiences as black femmes.

**I'd say a majority of the photo editors I know are female and it is, at least editorially, a pretty female-skewing career choice. I find that interesting given that this wave of inclusivity is somewhat recent.**

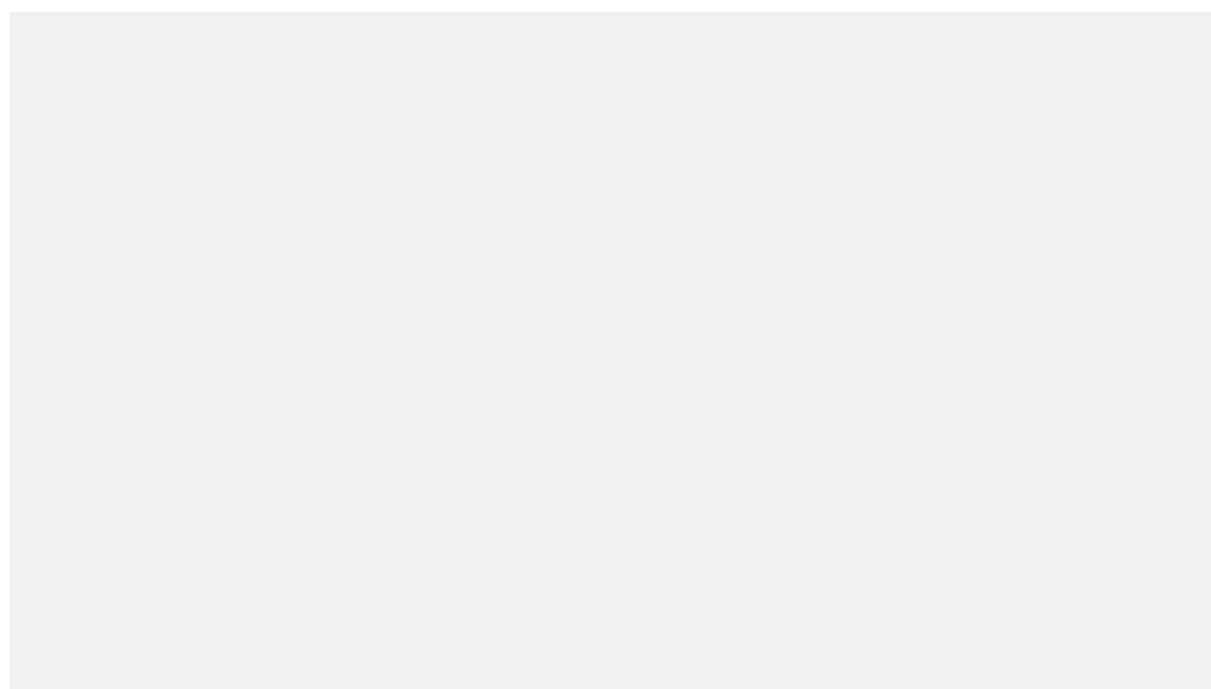
Most of the photo editors I know are female as well. However, I think it can become really easy for an editor to call upon the same photographers they're familiar with instead of branching out to find photographers that represent the cultures and stories that they want to share. I think it also has to do with the simple fact that, oftentimes, if there is a problem that doesn't affect you or is something that you never experience, for most people it's not something that you're immediately conscious of or concerned with. If you're an editor who never feels marginalized, you might not immediately

**What do you think about this trend of branded feminism and people co-opting the gaze to sell products?**

When brands co-opt the gaze to profit off of feminism, it always looks really silly to me because I immediately read it as forced and inauthentic. It's irritating and hurtful to see brands that have no interest in effecting any real change leech off of people's pain and desire for authentic representation.

**Who were some of the artists that you knew you had to include in this show?**

One of the first artists that came to mind was Jade Purple Brown. We were following each other on Instagram for a bit and I really wanted an excuse to meet up! Similarly, Miranda [Barnes] was following Makeda Sandford for a while on Instagram as well. Miranda and I met through social media and wanted to meet up IRL because we were both black femme photographers looking to expand our community of artists. With this show, we wanted to recreate that moment on a larger scale with 12 other artists and everyone who is interested in supporting their work.



Makeda Sandford



other and feel supported by a larger community of artists with similar experiences.

I also want the exhibit to give people outside of our community a look into black femme experiences. We're far more than our usual representations as the angry black girl or the magical black girl. All of these artists have compelling and unique experiences as black femmes that shine through in their work.

**Do you think exploitation is still possible under the female gaze?**

Unfortunately, exploitation under the female gaze happens all the time—from female directors casting one dark skin model to fill a diversity quota to tone deaf Pepsi commercials. It literally happens too often to count. Not to mention the consistent number of Kardashian-level incidents of people exploiting another culture for profit while erasing the originators and being completely oblivious to the challenges they face.

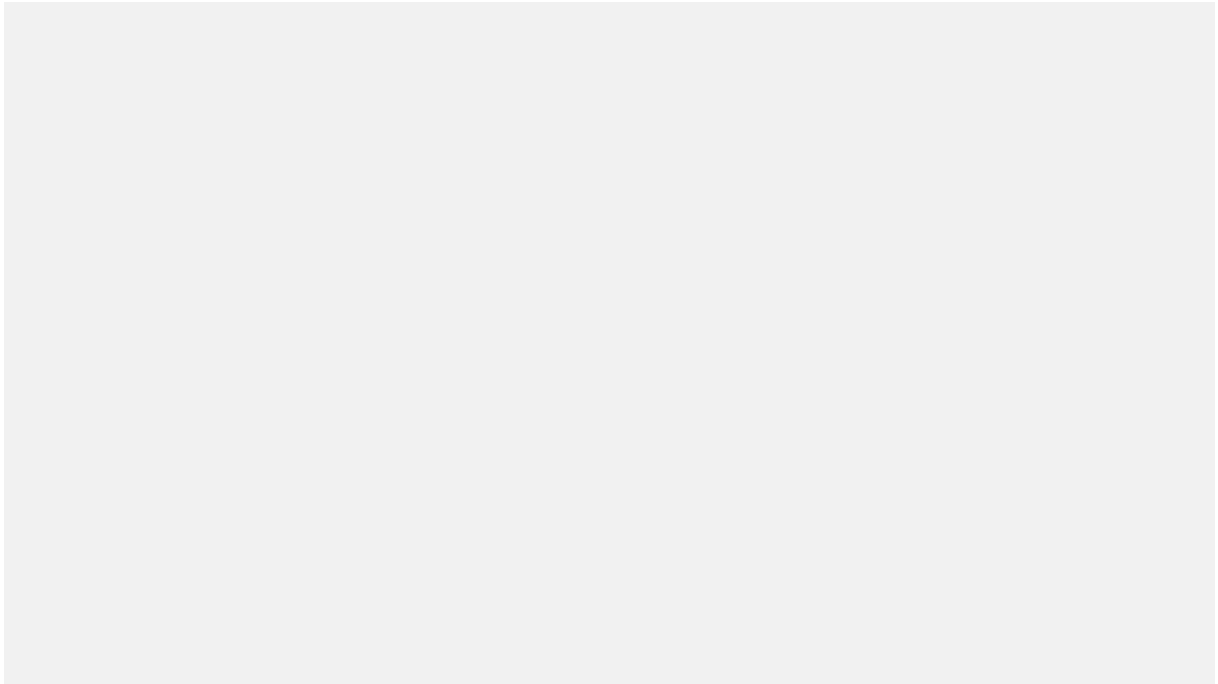
**What do you strive to do in your own photo practice?**

I want my work to act as an escape from reality. In my practice, I'm not afraid to experiment, relax, and be my authentic self. I hope my work inspires others to do the same.

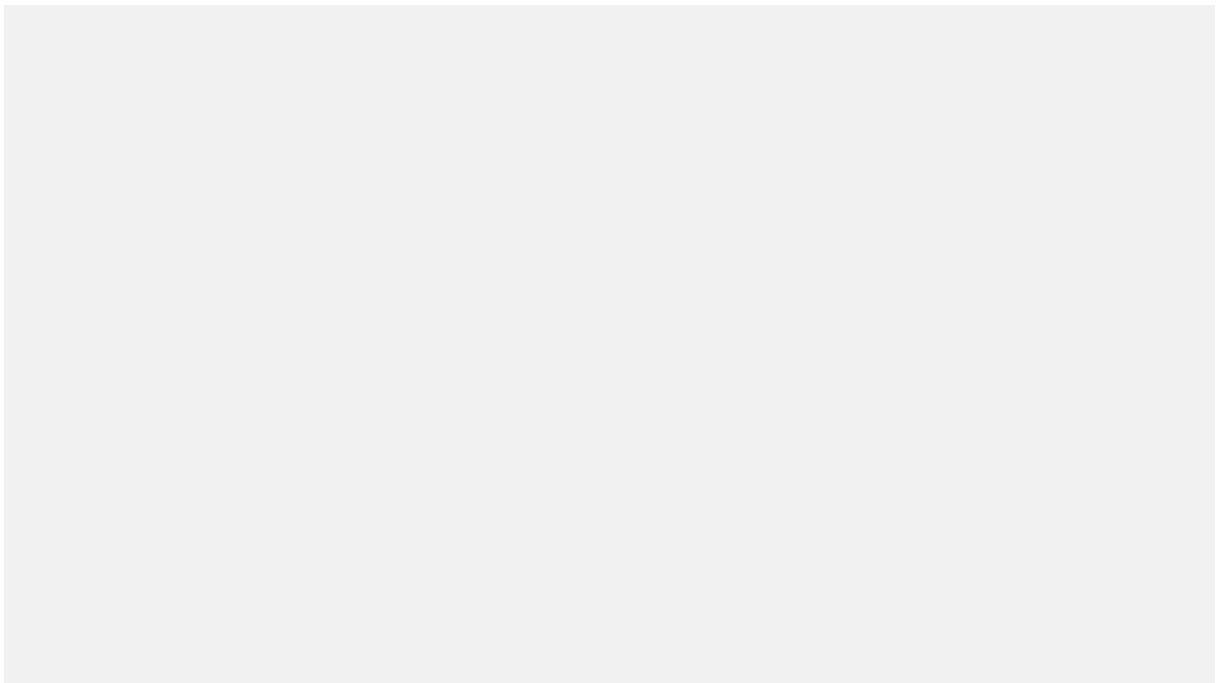




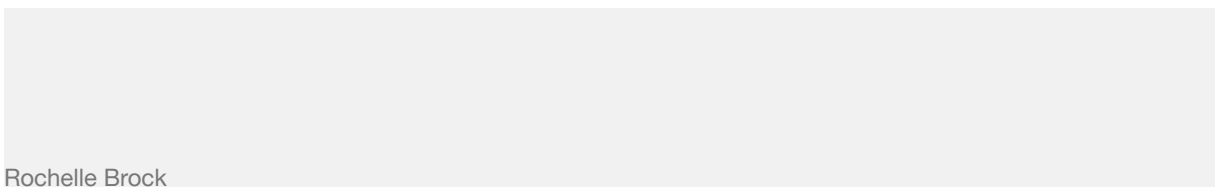
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Rochelle Brock



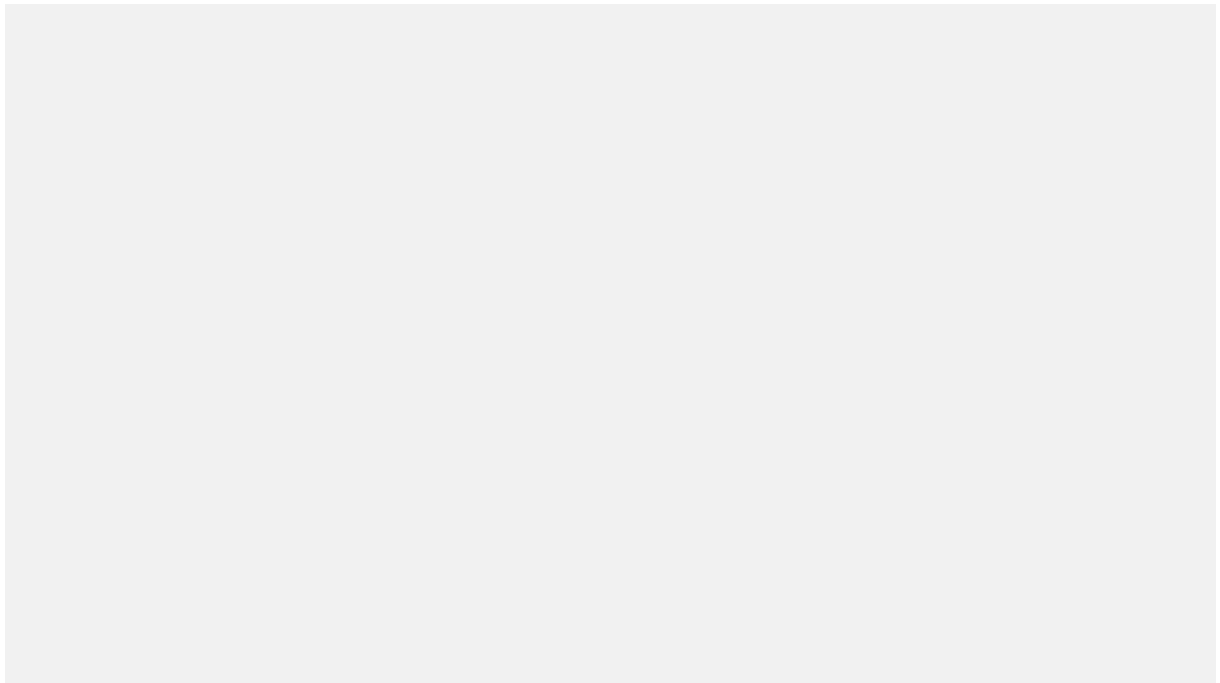
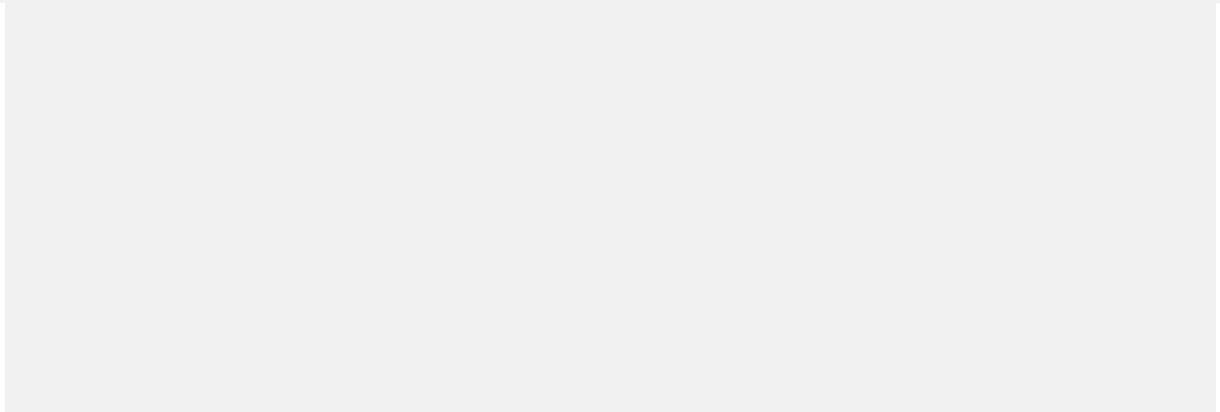
Tiffany Smith



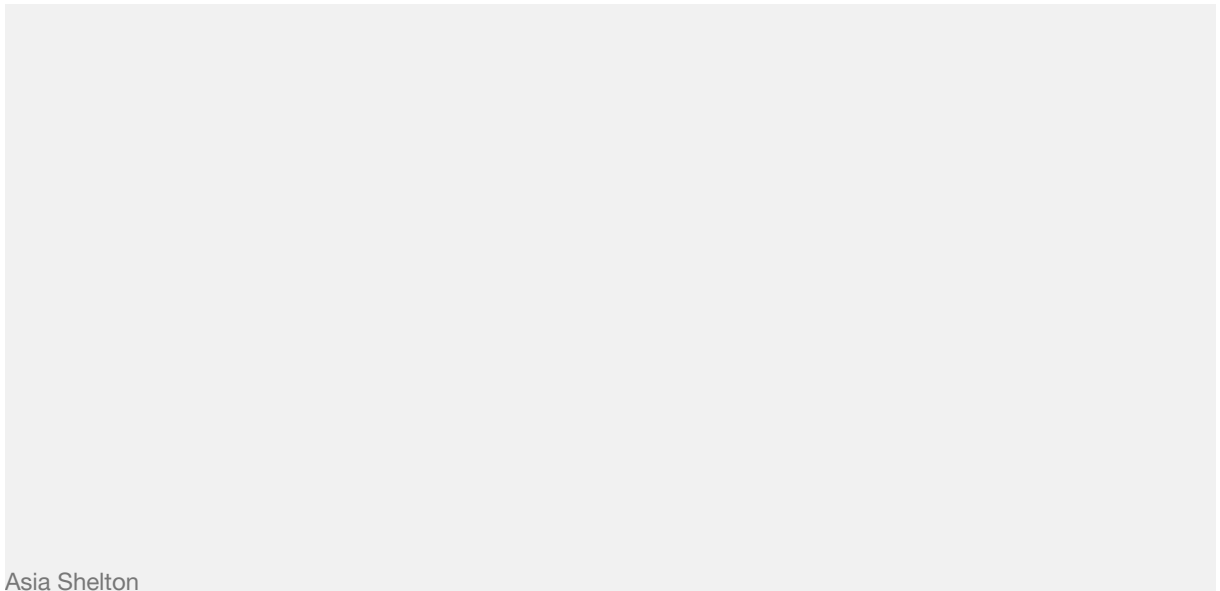
Rochelle Brock



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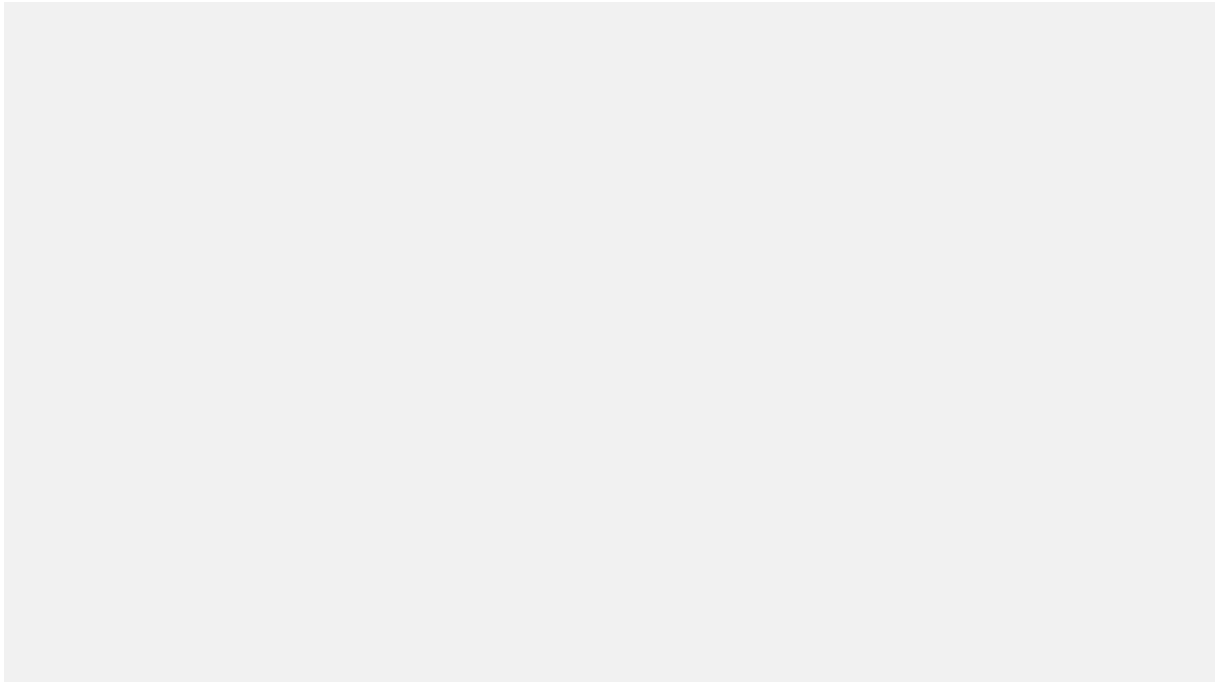
Jessica Spence



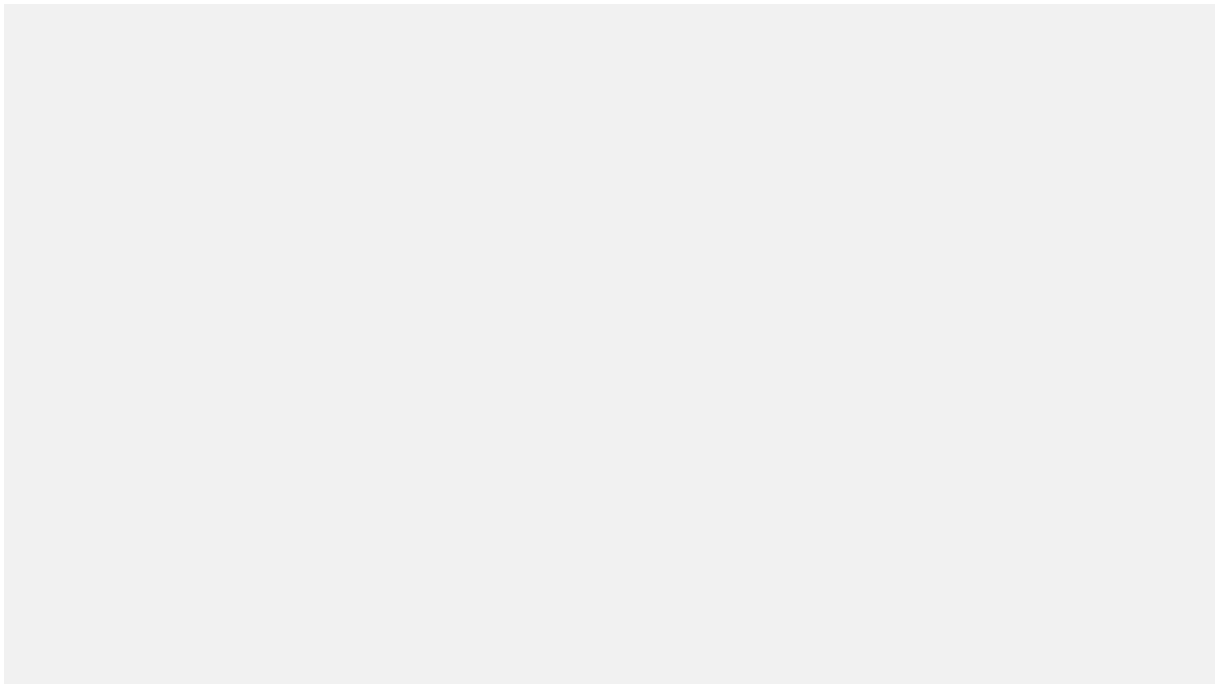
Asia Shelton



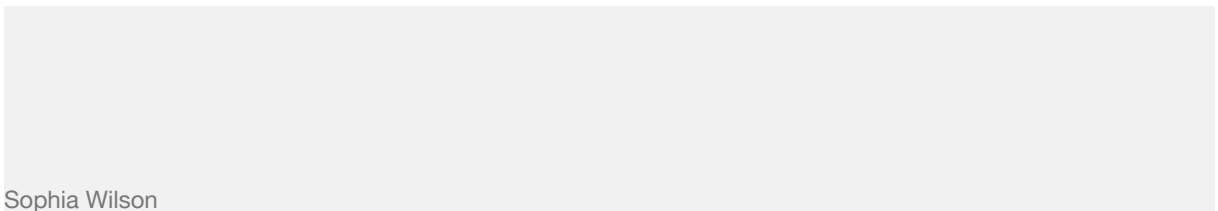
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Josette Roberts



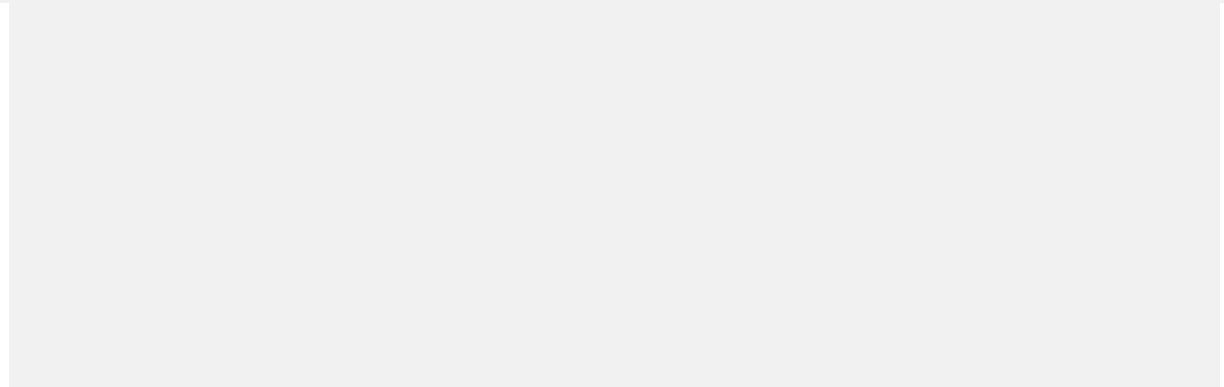
Francena Ottley



Sophia Wilson

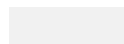


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The Future is (Black) Femme *opens tonight at 6:30 PM at [ATYPE](#)*

*Jessica Pettway is a photographer and curator based in NYC. You can view her work [here](#).*



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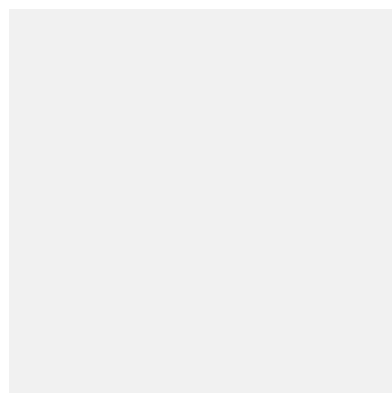
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TRACKING TRUMP'S CONGRESS

## The Twisted Logic of the Last, Desperate Attempt to Kill Obamacare



MARK HAY

Sep 23 2017, 9:15am

What are these guys thinking? (Photo by Alex Wong/Getty Images)

**John McCain is—predictably—a no on the new "repeal and replace" bill in Congress. So why did Republicans decide to risk failing spectacularly again in the first place?**



Seemingly out of nowhere, Republicans in Congress revived their obsessive quest to repeal Barack Obama's signature healthcare law this month. And once again, John McCain is set to be the one who dooms it.

This latest attempt to undo the Affordable Care Act comes in the form of what's known as the Graham-Cassidy bill, which would roll back Medicaid expansion, allocate (reduced) healthcare funding as general block grants, and end the individual mandate to have health insurance, among other steps that would functionally cripple the ACA framework. The bill would also end subsidies to help people afford private plans and make it easier for states to craft their own health insurance systems—including harsh ones that buck protections for pre-existing conditions and don't require certain basic treatments be covered.

On Monday, the Senate Finance Committee is scheduled to hold a hearing on the bill in advance of a vote expected in the chamber within the week—likely before it can be fully scored for its impact by the Congressional Budget Office. House Speaker Paul Ryan, for his part, is on board with getting bill through his chamber as it stands immediately after.

Killing the ACA has been a GOP goal for seven years, and we're now in crunch time before a September 30 deadline to use budget reconciliation rules to do so with a simple majority in the US Senate. Still, this last-ditch attempt came as something of a surprise. After their previous effort failed in July, the White House and Republican leadership seemed ready to throw in the towel. For weeks, and until as recently as this Tuesday, a bipartisan effort was underway to craft a bill to stabilize the ACA's individual marketplace, the one part of the program that *is* in some trouble. That approach would have also offered a few Republican reforms, like making it easier for states to design their own alternative systems. Even after a deal between President Donald Trump and the Democrats earlier this month on hurricane relief money and government funding opened up the September calendar, Republicans seemed content to focus on tax reform. As late as last

All of which begs the question of why Republicans leaned away from their big tax-reform pitch to go in on another potential disaster. It's an even more confusing decision when you consider how weakly supported and fragile the Graham-Cassidy proposal is.

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This general framework has actually been floating around since early summer, but failed to gain traction until now. That may be because it shares traits with previous efforts—especially the features that helped to tank them. A recent poll found that only 24 percent of Americans approve of this latest bill, which is better than the 17 percent low for the bill Republicans failed to pass in July. But this policy may actually be substantively worse for the public. "Graham-Cassidy would lead to far more disruption than any of the previous Republican plans," argued UCLA healthcare wonk Mark Peterson. "It borders on crazy."

Even as party leaders stump for this new bill, prominent Republicans and White House officials have openly expressed doubts about its prospects.

other likely—but not confirmed—Republican no votes ([Susan Collins](#) and [Rand Paul](#)) and secure one important uncommitted vote ([Lisa Murkowski](#)) in the Senate.

Republicans appear to have taken significant flack over their August recess—not just from irate masses at town halls, but also from pals and supporters angry at their abandonment of a signature pledge. "They probably felt they had to do [something] just to firm up Republican support for Republicans," said conservative-leaning American Enterprise Institute healthcare policy researcher Joe Antos.

Trump's fixation on showing he can follow through with his promises likely egged things along, too. In a meeting on the bipartisan effort last week, he was reportedly primarily concerned with whether or not he could spin the resultant bill as repeal-and-replace to voters. (Democrats were open to letting him try, but it would have rung hollow to his base and the country in general.)

Most of the experts I've spoken to agree a bipartisan bill could have passed. But that might have read as a tacit admission that the Republicans now accept the Affordable Care Act framework. And it likely would have passed with many or mostly Democratic votes, irking the GOP's conservative wing and potentially firing up more intra-party conflict as the far-right tried to reassert itself. "There was no element of what any Republican would have called a reform," Antos said of conservative thinking on the effort.

As pressure and dissatisfaction mounted, the fully formed Graham-Cassidy proposal was still floating around, and its creators were still stumping for it. "It does hit a bunch of buttons for Republicans, but not every button for everyone, and not even all buttons for any one Republican," said Antos. Still, it worked for scheduling and it was their last chance to do anything.

Although some Republicans suspect yet another failure will hurt them even





not as good as a repeal," Antos said. "But clearly they gave it the good, old Congressional try, and that's probably not a net negative. It just might be a zero."

Besides, a miracle victory on healthcare repeal could free up funding to channel into tax reform, widening its scope, according to George Washington University health policy researcher Leighton Ku. So between Tuesday and Wednesday, the White House and Republican leaders apparently agreed that the costs of inaction were greater than those of action—and decided to throw their weight totally against bipartisanship and behind the bill.

"The desperation of the Republicans and the Trump administration is showing," Peterson told me.

This Hail Mary pass will likely remain completely up in the air until we see how Collins, Murkowski, and Paul vote—or until two of those three issue McCain-level refutations of the bill. But Collins and Murkowski's concerns from the last go-around, after which their no votes were widely applauded in the press, remain, while Paul's insistence on a more ambitious repeal than this one may be all but impossible to satisfy. And it's possible a number of other moderates and conservatives in the Senate could peel off as well, to say nothing of what could happen in the House if it tries to pass an unchanged Senate bill.

Still, deadlines matter in Congress, and "last chance to do this" messaging should keep the bulk of the Republican caucus in line. Graham and company will work what they see as the three most important swing votes as hard as they can; it's become pretty apparent that they're trying insanely hard to buy off Murkowski's vote with the prospect of extra funding for Alaska, and perhaps other sparsely populated states, slipped into the bill.

This is truly the last-gasp effort to repeal the ACA, one openly based on the



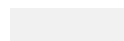
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the state of America's democracy, albeit not a surprising one.

In theory, if this bill tanks—and it probably will—bipartisan efforts could resume, and the ACA could be stabilized quickly and easily. "Republicans will own whatever comes out of this congressional session," Peterson told me. So to not be the party that blew everything up and walked away empty-handed, "there will be strong incentives to stabilize the insurance markets," he said.

That's some cold comfort in this disheartening moment for the state of America's healthcare system. But only some.

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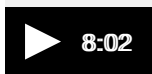
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