

# Ted Cruz attempts to defund D.C.'s health care individual mandate, but fails

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WASHINGTON — The Senate rejected Republican Sen. Ted Cruz's attempt to defund the District of Columbia's enforcement of an individual health insurance mandate Wednesday.

Cruz's amendment to a Senate appropriations bill was his latest attack on individual mandates, which were a hallmark of the Affordable Care Act. The

district's local mandate requires D.C. residents to carry health insurance or face a fine.

The Senate voted 54-44 to table the measure, effectively killing it. Five Republicans, including Sens. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Susan Collins of Maine, joined Democrats and independents in voting to table.

Cruz said on the Senate floor that senators who voted to table the amendment were "voting to raise taxes," referring to the penalties. He also said many of those who would be fined are low-income residents, which he called "cruel and unfair."

"Do you raise taxes on single moms who are struggling to make ends meet, to provide for their kids, who can't afford health insurance? And now every Democrat has squarely voted to impose tax fines on the most vulnerable," Cruz said.

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., called the amendment a "poison pill rider" that could jeopardize the minibus appropriations bill's passage during his floor speech.

Eleanor Holmes Norton, a Democrat who serves as a D.C. delegate to Congress, echoed his language in a statement after the vote.

"I thank the Senate for rejecting Senator Cruz's poison pill amendment that would have undemocratically interfered with the local laws of the nation's capital," Norton said.

The [House had already passed an identical amendment](#) blocking D.C.'s individual mandate.

The mandate, a controversial cornerstone of the Affordable Care Act, was rolled back in the Republican tax overhaul passed in December. Cruz was a

key figure in [pushing for](#) the rollback to be included in the tax bill, and previously in forcing a [government shutdown](#) over the Affordable Care Act in 2013.

Vermont, New Jersey and Massachusetts have state-level individual mandates.

The District of Columbia does not have a voting member of the House or Senate. Norton cannot vote on the House floor, though she can participate in procedural and committee votes. The Constitution gives Congress complete power over the district's legislative affairs.

This isn't the first time Cruz has weighed in on D.C. policy.

During his time as solicitor general in Texas, he [filed a Supreme Court brief](#) against D.C.'s ban on handguns in *District of Columbia vs. Heller*. In 2015, before announcing his candidacy for president, Cruz introduced measures to [overturn](#) D.C. anti-discrimination laws regarding birth control for employees and LGBT rights in religious schools. He has also repeatedly tried to push [school choice programs](#) in the district.

Norton has railed against Cruz's health care amendment and previous involvement, saying in a [statement](#) last week that Cruz was "stealing precious time and effort from his Texas constituents to abuse congressional power by interfering with the affairs of another Member's district."