
Congress Must Block Administration's Illegal Cuts, Protect Affordable Health Care

Statement of Sharon Parrott, CBPP President, on the federal government shutdown:

Today's government funding shutdown is fundamentally different than prior funding fights because the Administration is acting outside the law. Any funding agreement must put a stop to this pattern of lawlessness. I have long opposed shutdowns and debt limit brinkmanship, but the Administration's actions will harm people, the economy, and our democracy for years to come if they are not stopped.

Make no mistake, shutdowns hurt people. The federal government provides a wide range of critical public services. And the President has even implied that he will use a shutdown to impose harsher consequences than required by law, threatening to fire many federal workers and cut benefits for large numbers of people. That would undoubtedly worsen the harm. The President shouldn't use the people he is elected to serve as pawns in a political game.

Still, an Administration that openly defies Congress by unlawfully canceling or freezing funding approved on a bipartisan basis can impose tremendous harm for years to come. We know from the President's own budget that the Administration wants to slash fruits and vegetables for toddlers provided through WIC, cut funding for schools, cut mental health funding, take housing and homelessness services away from families, decimate our nation's investments in medical research at the National Institutes of Health, and more. Unchecked, the Administration can illegally cut anything it wants — during a short-term funding agreement or under a full-year funding law.

So Congress must ensure that any funding deal stops the Administration from unilaterally or illegally undoing parts of bipartisan funding laws simply because the President dislikes them, or no agreement reached will be worth the paper it is written on. It is long-settled law that these unilateral funding cuts — known as impoundment — are illegal. The courts should step in and stop this end-run around Congress, but it seems unlikely that courts will act soon enough. If Congress, too, fails to step in, parents and children, communities, and the economy are at the whim of a President bent on currying favor with some and harming others. Ultimately, if not addressed, such lawlessness will put our democracy in peril.

At the same time, policymakers can't wait until the end of the year to prevent a looming, massive spike in health care costs for more than 20 million people. Unless Congress acts quickly, people who shop for marketplace coverage starting November 1 will be told that their premiums for next year are skyrocketing. Many will decide they can't afford to sign up for coverage at all. But Republican

leaders and the President are refusing to address this issue now, and many congressional Republicans oppose preventing these cost spikes altogether.

Imagine being a couple with income around \$42,000 (or about 200 percent of the federal poverty level for a family of two) who own a small business and are approaching retirement age. Their Affordable Care Act marketplace premiums could more than *triple* next year unless Congress acts. Millions of households will face impossible decisions about how they will keep coverage — which may be making cancer treatment or lifesaving medication affordable — in the face of such astronomical premium increases.

Perhaps it is easy for the President and many Republican members of Congress whose coverage for next year is ensured to dismiss the concerns of this family who cannot afford a lapse in coverage or the price spikes that are coming and say that resolving how much their coverage will cost and the impact on their family's budget can wait until the end of the year, but it shouldn't be.

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