

Beyond the Shutdown: Country Needs Congress and President to Address Health Care Cost Spikes and Rule of Law

Statement of Sharon Parrott, CBPP President, on Senate legislation to end the shutdown

Shutdowns are damaging – especially lengthy ones – and reopening the government is important. But two fundamental issues remain unaddressed, and Congress needs to tackle them without delay.

First, Republican members of Congress need to come to the table in good faith to address the looming, massive spike in health care costs for more than 20 million people.

With people already shopping on the marketplaces, there is no time for more delay. And it is an utter waste of time for Republicans to once again take us back into a debate about effectively repealing the Affordable Care Act with proposals that would eviscerate protections for people with pre-existing conditions, make health care unaffordable for low- and middle-income people, and disguise more tax cuts for rich people as health care.

The fact is that if Republicans and the President refuse to extend the premium tax credit enhancements, millions of people will face astronomical premium increases, including small business owners, young adults, and workers without affordable employer coverage. Many will decide that they can't afford to sign up for coverage at all; that's why the Congressional Budget Office projects that nearly 4 million people will become uninsured.

Second, Congress must ensure that any final funding deal stops the Administration from illegally or unilaterally undoing parts of bipartisan funding laws simply because the President dislikes them. The Trump Administration has frozen funding for medical research, withheld billions in school funding, and pushed out tens of thousands of workers at agencies like the Social Security Administration, harming critical services.

While it is a positive step that the agreement reverses firings that took place during the shutdown and prohibits additional firings through January 30, that is not enough. Congress must adopt guardrails

against illegal impoundments, fast-track rescissions, and unilateral “pocket” rescissions, and create long-term prohibitions against unjustified mass layoffs. Without these protections, parents and children, communities, federal workers, and the economy are at the whim of a President to pick and choose which parts of the law to follow, currying favor with some and harming others.

It's also important to reflect on what this shutdown has revealed.

The shutdown put into even sharper relief the Trump Administration's wrongheaded priorities. At every turn during the shutdown, the President has demonstrated a willingness to hurt the people he was elected to serve to suit his political strategy. Most egregious has been the Administration's relentless effort to keep people from getting help affording food, leaving millions of people to go hungry for perceived political gain, even as the Administration admitted in court they had the resources and authority to provide assistance.

The cruelty is shocking but not surprising, given what we have seen throughout this Administration, including enactment of the harmful Republican megabill that will take away health coverage and food assistance from millions of people to partly fund massive tax cuts for the wealthy. And, of course, the President's own budget proposals called for deep cuts in a range of areas like housing affordability and food assistance that would hurt people's ability to afford the basics.

In addition, the shutdown has made visible the federal government's often overlooked but vital role in providing critical services that people value and depend on, from food assistance, help paying for heating, and preschool for young kids, to safe and orderly air travel and so much more. At a time when too much of the public conversation, particularly from President Trump and those who work for him, aims to denigrate the role of government, the shutdown has offered a valuable reminder of the important roles it plays in our day-to-day lives.

It is important to note that the continuing resolution and appropriations bills that will be considered have some important shortcomings. For example, the continuing resolution doesn't include a provision that would ensure more than 170,000 formerly homeless people don't lose their housing in 2026, and it fails to ensure that SNAP and WIC participants would not again be at risk of benefit disruptions if there is another lapse in appropriations next year.

.....

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization and policy institute that conducts research and analysis on a range of government policies and programs. It is supported primarily by foundation grants.