

# With mass hunger approaching as food stamps expire Saturday, huge price increases revealed for Obamacare healthcare plans

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On Saturday, food stamps are set to expire, threatening 42 million Americans with hunger. At the same time, tens of millions are confronting massive price increases for healthcare, as open enrollment begins for private insurance plans sponsored by the Affordable Care Act (ACA), commonly known as Obamacare.

The Trump administration is using hunger as a weapon of class war, withholding \$6 billion in emergency funding during the government shutdown. He is using the shutdown to advance plans for dictatorship by undermining congressional control over the budget and imposing personal control over the government.

As far as Congress is concerned, the major issue in the shutdown, now approaching the longest in American history, is the fate of enhanced premium tax credits for privately run, publicly subsidized ACA healthcare plans, set to expire at the end of the year. The Democrats are using this to grandstand while doing nothing to oppose Trump's fascist dictatorship.

Nevertheless, the impact of the expiration of these tax credits will be huge. With the open enrollment period also set to begin November 1, previews of plans in 30 states were released Wednesday showing enormous increases to out-of-pocket costs. The Kaiser Family Foundation estimates that insurers plan on raising prices by 26 percent on average. For those receiving enhanced premium tax credits, net premiums are set to more than double by 114 percent through a combination of price increases and the loss of subsidies.

According to the Bipartisan Policy Institute: "a family of four with a household income of \$45,000

(140% of [the federal poverty line]) with a \$0 premium in 2025 [due to subsidies] will see their premiums increase to \$1,607 a year. Also, a 60-year-old couple with an annual income at 402% of FPL (about \$85,000) could pay a yearly premium of \$22,600 in 2026, or about a quarter of their annual income, instead of 8.5% of their income (as established under enhanced PTCs)."

The impact could be that 4.8 million people will no longer be able to afford health insurance, according to a September study by the Urban Institute.

The vast social crisis that could be unleashed in two days shows that the social content of Trump's dictatorship is a war on the working class, imposing on them the costs of the mounting crisis of US capitalism by throwing conditions back decades. It comes amid announcements of thousands of layoffs at Amazon and other major corporations.

Private food banks are scrambling to make up for at least some of the impact. But if things continue, it is likely that scenes of endless food lines reminiscent of the Great Depression could play out across the country.

"It's very difficult. It's not like we were holding back before," Jason Riggs, director of advocacy and public policy at Roadrunner Food Bank of New Mexico, told NPR. "Then this crisis comes in and it's very daunting. SNAP can provide nine times the amount of meals as the entire nationwide food bank network. There's no business in the country, no corporation that could grow nine times its size or capacity in one year, let alone by Nov. 1."

Wisconsin Public Radio carried a report Wednesday of one food bank, which saw a 50 percent increase in demand earlier this week. "A good number of them are folks that our volunteers and staff hadn't seen before,"

one official said.

Food banks in the Washington D.C. area have already seen huge lines of federal workers due to the shutdown. About 275,000 residents in the broader metropolitan area are currently enrolled in food stamps.

Twenty-five states have filed suit against Trump's decision to allow food stamps to expire. The program is jointly administered by the federal and state governments. But Trump, who already attempted to violently overthrow the 2020 election in the January 6 putsch, is not playing by any legal framework. Last Thursday, his longtime political adviser Steve Bannon admitted to a secret plan for Trump to remain in office for an unconstitutional third term.

Using mass hunger as blackmail, the administration has declared that it will not restart food stamps until total capitulation by the Democrats. House Speaker Mike Johnson declared, with malicious satisfaction: "On Saturday, this gets very real. SNAP benefits will stop flowing to all those who need it."

But there is more than congressional arithmetic involved here. This is the tip of the spear of a social counterrevolution.

Already there has been a \$180 billion cut to food stamps and a sharp increase in eligibility requirements under the "Big Beautiful Bill." Once food stamp funding is finally restored—assuming Trump has any intention of doing so—over 20 million people will find that their benefits have either been reduced or dropped entirely.

And while the Democrats make a show of opposing the expiration of ACA tax credits, this amounts to only a drop in the bucket compared to the \$900 billion cut to Medicaid over 10 years in the same law. Beginning January 1, there will be a sharp increase in work requirements for Medicaid, part of the drive to fund trillions in tax cuts for the wealthy.

The Democrats' overriding concern is the fear that opposition to Trump could develop into a broad social movement against inequality. They are determined to prevent this at all costs. But they agree with the fundamental direction of policy: higher levels of exploitation to fund an increase in military spending and to prop up Wall Street.

There are already signs that the Democrats might cave in to Trump in the next few days. Senate Majority Leader John Thune told *Politico* that talks with the

Democrats have "ticked up significantly," adding that "Deadlines have a way of doing that."

Such a deal could only be a wholesale surrender. On the same day, Thune launched into a tirade on the floor of the Senate, hypocritically blaming Democrats for the expiration of food stamps on the grounds that they refused to support Republican bills to reopen the government without any concessions. His speech came in response to a Democrat-sponsored bill to fund food stamps and the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) food programs only.

On that same day, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer declared his support for a competing bill by Republican Senator Josh Hawley to maintain funding for food stamps. The measure has little chance of passing because it does not have the support of the Republican leadership; Hawley himself used the bill primarily to attack the Democrats.

But this statement is remarkable because Hawley is a fascist and a key co-conspirator in the January 6 coup attempt. Within the Republican Party, the specific role he plays is to provide a pseudo-populist gloss to Trump's fascist program. He has close ties to officials from the Teamsters and other unions.

Opposition can and must come from the working class. The fight in defense of the social rights of the working class must be fused with the fight against dictatorship and the corporate oligarchy behind it.

The sharp increase in Obamacare premiums also exposes the fraud of Obamacare's private healthcare "reform." The ACA is a system of subsidies to health insurance companies to provide substandard coverage. The issue is not reforming capitalism but abolishing it: the nationalization of healthcare, the banks, and the major industries and the use of their vast resources to guarantee access to food, healthcare and other social needs for all.



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