

Republicans Float Health-Care Fixes as Shutdown Impasse Drags On

Oct 29, 2025, 4:22 PM EDT

Republicans are discussing policies for a health package focused on lowering insurance premiums and changing regulation of pharmacy middlemen as the shutdown standoff with Democrats continues.

House Majority Leader Steve Scalise (R-La.) said Wednesday he's working with the Energy and Commerce, Ways and Means, and Education and Workforce committees on ideas to lower health premiums. He pointed to Republican efforts earlier this year to fund cost-sharing reduction payments.

Insurers are required to provide certain enrollees discounts on their deductibles, copayments, and coinsurance, and until 2017, insurers were reimbursed by the government for the reductions. Republicans proposed restarting those payments during negotiations on their tax law, but the provision didn't make it into the final version.

"We're all focused on lowering premiums for families, and there are a lot of ideas like that," Scalise said in a statement.

The potential for skyrocketing premiums is central to the shutdown fight. Democrats insist Republicans need to support an extension of enhanced Affordable Care Act tax credits as part of a government funding measure to avoid large increases in premium payments. Open enrollment for the Obamacare Marketplace starts on Nov. 1, where enrollees are expected to be hit with sticker shock due to a lack of an extension.

Pharmacy Benefit Managers

Scalise also pointed to efforts to overhaul regulation of pharmacy benefit managers, a bipartisan initiative. Health insurers use pharmacy benefit managers to implement drug benefits and negotiate drug prices, and in recent years have been blamed for rising health costs.

The House overwhelmingly passed changes in 2023 that would place transparency requirements on such middlemen and prohibit spread pricing, where the PBM charges a plan or patient more than it paid for a drug, pocketing the difference. The Senate didn't act on the bill.

"Obviously, can't do that while the government shut down, but the conversations have been going on," Scalise said. "The committees have been working on a lot of really good ideas."

Sen. Mike Crapo (R-Idaho), who chairs the Finance Committee, also said discussions were occurring over other health policies to pursue for an end-of-year package, adding

that lawmakers are looking at a wide range of possibilities. He said PBM changes could come back, but nothing is certain at this point.

President Donald Trump could be willing to discuss health issues—if Democrats vote to reopen the government, Majority Leader John Thune said on the Senate floor Wednesday.

“Republicans are brimming over with health care ideas — from cost-sharing reductions to actually lower health care — or health plan costs I should say, to association health plans, to ways to stop Obamacare’s spiral of enriching insurers at the expense of everyday Americans,” the South Dakota Republican said.