

Shutdown Revives GOP's Divisions, Struggles on Health Care

By Jonathan Tamari | October 10, 2025 5:00AM ET

House Republicans are divided over the health care fight at the center of the government shutdown. Many don't want to touch it at all.

Bloomberg Government contacted all 219 House GOP lawmakers this week to ask whether they support extending the expiring subsidies that help millions of people purchase health insurance through the Affordable Care Act.

The vast majority — around 190 — stayed silent on the topic that has become a key to the shutdown, and which Democrats aim to place at the heart of the 2026 midterm elections.

Of the roughly three dozen Republicans who did answer, views were fractured: Some called firmly for ending the tax breaks, others for extending them, and still others say they would consider an extension with reforms, but only after Senate Democrats vote to reopen the government. Some responded only to say they had no comment, and some issued lengthy statements that offered no clear conclusion.

"I'd like to see them go away. But I do understand that there's a significant impact on some families," Rep. Lloyd Smucker (R-Pa.) said in an interview that embodied the dilemma.

Like many Republicans, Rep. Lloyd Smucker (R-Pa.) is conflicted over the fate of the subsidies.

Vacillating between concern about the federal price tag and premium increases for millions of people, he concluded, "I don't know exactly how this ends up. I don't know exactly where I'll be on it."

The mixed answers reflect divisions that Democrats hope to exploit, wielding fears of price hikes against Republican leaders who insist they won't negotiate during a shutdown.

More broadly, the responses show Republicans remain unsettled and uneasy on the political flashpoint of health care.

"Republicans have always struggled to identify exactly where they are on health care," said Doug Heye, a former senior aide to one-time House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.).

"It's easy to be against something," he said, pointing to the GOP's more than decade-long fight against the ACA, often called Obamacare. But, he added, "what are you actually going to do is much tougher."

‘Silencing’ Lawmakers

The dilemma grew this week when Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.) made a high-profile call to extend the subsidies, breaking sharply with GOP leaders.

She said many Republicans agree, but are scared to say so.

“I’m getting text messages from quite a few people and its building because I’m starting to speak out on it,” Greene told Bloomberg Government. “They’re always terrified to go against the talking points that are given out.”

Democrats rode health care to sweeping electoral success in 2018 and hope to do so again next year. The subsidies could be especially potent because 12 million people in Republican-held House districts have health coverage through the ACA, even more than the 8 million in Democratic districts, according to the nonpartisan health research group KFF.

Premium payments could more than double, on average, for those who purchase insurance through the law if the subsidies expire, KFF estimates.

The law has grown popular over the years, but many Republicans have long vowed to unravel it.

Democrats are using the potential price hikes against GOP lawmakers and to press President Donald Trump to support an extension of the credits, something he has at times been open to.

Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.) has canceled House votes since Sept. 19, keeping his lawmakers away from Washington and effectively shielding them from direct questions about the shutdown and subsidies.

“He’s not keeping the House closed, he’s silencing his own members,” said Sen. Andy Kim (D-N.J.), a former House member.

Rep. Richard Neal(D-Mass.), the top Democrat on the House Ways and Means Committee, said Johnson is squeezed by premium hike fears and outrage from the right if he backs an ACA deal.

“He’s caught between the premium notices and the Freedom Caucus,” Neal said.

Four Camps

Johnson says he’s canceling votes until Senate Democrats drop their opposition and vote to reopen the government.

“They’re trying to make this about health care. It’s not. It’s about keeping Congress operating so we can get to health care,” Johnson said Thursday. “Health care issues were always going to be” discussed and debated in October and November, he said.

Within the GOP ranks the answers are more complicated.

Responses to Bloomberg Government fell largely into four camps.

Most declined to comment or offered non-answers. One office asked that any response include a full explanation of the lawmakers’ position. Several blamed Democrats for the expiration of the subsidies, without taking a stand on extending them.

“Democrats manufactured the problem, and now they’re refusing to fix it,” said a statement from Rep. Derrick Van Orden(R-Wisc.). He didn’t say if the subsidies should continue.

Some, mostly hard-right conservatives, are firmly against the subsidies, which Democrats temporarily increased during the pandemic.

“If Democrats wanted to make them permanent, they should have indicated that when they passed them,” said a statement from Rep. Keith Self (R-Texas). “Republicans need to do what is right and let these expire.”

Echoing many others, he said the subsidies funnel billions to insurance companies. Others complained that the subsidies go to even wealthy families.

On the other side are a handful of Republicans from swing districts who support a one-year extension, saying it will buy time to improve the system without hurting those counting on aid.

“We are providing critical relief and ensuring millions of families can keep their coverage without facing massive cost increases,” said Rep. Carlos Gimenez (R-Fla.), whose district has one of the country’s highest concentrations of ACA marketplace participants, according to KFF.

He’s among 15 Republicans backing a bipartisan bill to temporarily extend the subsidies — more than enough, if they join with Democrats, to pass it through the House, though Democratic leaders want a permanent fix.

But even some Republicans who often serve as deal-makers say they won’t give in to shutdown demands.

“If Democrats would vote to reopen the government, we can sit down and fix this,” said Rep. Don Bacon (R-Neb.).