

DEFEND **AMERICA**
ACTION

— REPORT · OCTOBER 2026

America Is Paying for Donald Trump's *Mess*

Affordability is the top concern across the country, and Trump and Republicans in Congress have spent nearly two years making it worse.

A REPORT · OCTOBER 2026

Ask Americans what worries them most, and poll after poll returns the same answer: *the cost of living.*

It's now the top issue for 84 percent of voters, and two-thirds of voters blame Donald Trump's policies. This crisis didn't come from nowhere; Trump and Republicans in Congress built the squeeze one decision at a time. First, they ripped away over \$1 trillion from Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act (ACA), the largest health care cuts in American history, putting roughly 15 million Americans on track to lose their insurance and sending ACA premiums up more than 50 percent this year. They also cut \$187 billion from food assistance, and more than 5 million people have already been pushed off SNAP, about 2 million of them children. Then, Trump started a war with Iran that has cost American families \$101 billion more at the pump and made this the first October on record with gas above \$4 a gallon. Trump also cut off the emergency housing vouchers that kept tens of thousands of families housed, froze child care funding for more than 500,000 children, and killed or delayed more than \$75 billion in energy investments and nearly 146,000 jobs. Trump and Republicans in Congress have spent almost two years rewarding their rich and powerful friends at the expense of everyone else, and working families across America are the ones paying the price.

The damage shows up in every household budget. Inflation is up to 3.7 percent year-over-year now. A record 22.7 million renter households — nearly half of all renters in America — now spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing, and home prices have climbed 54 percent since 2020 to nearly five times the median income. The average family paid \$13,184 for child care last year, and care for two children now costs more than rent in every state with data. Ground beef has hit a record above \$7 a pound, coffee tops \$9, and food banks are buying record amounts of food to keep up with demand. Hiring nearly stalled at 29,000 jobs last month, 328,000 federal workers have been pushed out of their jobs, farm bankruptcies jumped 46 percent last year, and a record 55 percent of Americans say their finances are getting worse. All told, the average American household has had to spend an estimated \$4,700 more on everyday essentials under Trump, and less than two years into his second term, 79 percent of voters disapprove of the job he is doing on the cost of living.

— BY THE NUMBERS

The American affordability crisis, in figures.

\$4,700

More the average American household has spent on everyday essentials under Trump.

Joint Economic Committee

84%

Of voters rank cost-of-living as a top issue heading into the midterms. 79% disapprove of Trump's handling of it.

AP-NORC

15M

Americans on track to lose health insurance from the Trump-GOP Medicaid & ACA cuts.

Center on Budget & Policy Priorities

+50%

Average monthly ACA premium increase in 2026 after Trump and Republicans killed the tax credits.

Joint Economic Committee

22.7M

Renter households — a record — now spend more than 30% of income on housing.

Harvard Joint Center for Housing

\$101B

Extra Americans have paid for gas since Trump's war with Iran — \$856 per household on average.

Joint Economic Committee

5M+

Americans pushed off SNAP since Trump-GOP cuts — a 13% drop, including about 2 million children.

Center on Budget & Policy Priorities

328K

Federal workers pushed out of their jobs after Trump's mass firings of government employees.

Economic Policy Institute

SECTION 01 · COST OF LIVING

Cost-of-living *towers over* every other issue in America.

Americans are facing high prices due to Trump's economic policies. Heading into the midterms, the cost-of-living ranks as one of the most important issues for 84 percent of voters, alongside the economy at 85 percent, and 79 percent disapprove of Trump's handling of the cost-of-living, with 74 percent disapproving of his handling of the economy. 65 percent of Americans say Trump's policies, rather than factors outside his control, are to blame for persistently high costs, and his approval on the economy has sunk to 26 percent, a new low. Nine in ten Americans say prices are the most important factor shaping their view of the economy. A record 55 percent of Americans say their financial situation is getting worse, and 55 percent say rising prices are causing their family hardship.

Prices are outpacing paychecks under Trump.

The average American household has had to spend an estimated \$4,700 more on everyday essentials since Trump took office again, including \$915 more on housing and \$310 more on groceries in his first year alone. This week's inflation report, the last before the midterms, showed prices up 3.7 percent over the past year, up from 3.4 percent in August, with energy up 20.4 percent, gasoline up 34.2 percent, electricity up 4.4 percent, restaurant prices up 3.5 percent, and shelter up 3.2 percent. Every one of those categories is outpacing the 3 percent growth in wages, and real average hourly earnings have fallen 0.7 percent over the past year, meaning the typical worker's paycheck buys less today than it did a year ago.

Trump's economy is stalling out.

The economy added just 29,000 jobs in September, down from an average of 45,000 a month over the prior year, and there are now 328,000 fewer federal jobs than when Trump took office again after his mass firings of government workers. Another 145,966 jobs have been lost or delayed thanks to Trump's clean energy funding cuts and delays alone. With inflation climbing again, the Federal Reserve raised interest rates in September for the first time in three years and is weighing another hike this month. Consequently, the 30-year mortgage rate has climbed to 7.28 percent, up from 7.04 percent the week Trump took office.

SECTION 02 · HOUSING

America's housing crisis has *deepened* under Trump.

Housing costs have never been higher, and Trump and Republicans are pulling away the federal help that keeps families housed. A record 22.7 million renter households, 49 percent of all renters, now spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing, including 12.1 million who spend more than half, and the ranks of cost-burdened renters have grown by 2.3 million since 2019. Home prices have climbed 54 percent since 2020 to nearly five times the median income, existing home sales are stuck at a three-decade low of 4.1 million, and the country has lost more than 7 million apartments renting for under \$1,000 a month in the past decade. American families have spent \$915 more on housing costs such as rent and mortgage payments since Trump took office, and homebuilders estimate that Trump's tariffs on lumber, steel, and building materials add a typical \$10,900 to the cost of a new home.

Trump rips away housing help.

Trump's HUD cut off the Emergency Housing Voucher program roughly four years early, and the more than 47,000 households still using the vouchers this spring, most of them formerly homeless or fleeing domestic violence, stand to lose their rental assistance as the money runs out this year. Trump's latest budget bars local housing authorities from issuing new vouchers to any new family, imposes time limits and work requirements on rental assistance, and zeroes out the HOME and Community Development Block Grant programs that build and repair affordable housing, after his previous budget sought an unprecedented 43 percent cut to rental assistance programs serving more than 4.4 million of the lowest-income households in the country.

SECTION 03 · HEALTH CARE

Health care costs are up thanks to *Trump & Republicans*.

The Trump-GOP law cut over \$1 trillion from Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act (ACA), including more than \$900 billion from Medicaid, the largest cut in the program's history. The law's Medicaid and marketplace cuts will leave 15 million more Americans uninsured by 2034. Already, around 8 million Americans have lost health care coverage since the passage of the GOP law, including over 5 million on Medicaid/CHIP and nearly 3 million enrolled in ACA plans. After Trump and Republicans ripped away ACA tax credits, premiums skyrocketed: monthly ACA premiums rose over 50 percent on average in 2026, and deductibles surged by more than \$1,000. ACA enrollment is now expected to slide as low as 17.5 million by the end of the year, and insurers are seeking another double-digit median premium increase for 2027.

America's hospitals on the brink.

More than 10 million rural Americans rely on Medicaid, and 400+ rural hospitals are vulnerable to closure, with 41 percent of rural hospitals already operating in the red before the hundreds of billions in expected losses from the Trump-GOP Medicaid cuts even hit their budgets. Since the law passed, over 1,250 hospitals, clinics, and providers across the country have closed, cut services, or are at risk of doing so.

SECTION 04 · ENERGY & GAS

Trump *drives up* energy costs across the country.

Energy is the single biggest force behind the inflation Americans are living with today. Energy prices are up 20.4 percent over the past year, more than five times the overall inflation rate, and gasoline alone accounted for more than half of September's price increase. Now, the share of Americans who name energy costs as their family's top financial problem has reached its highest point since 2008.

Trump's war with Iran sent gas & diesel prices soaring.

Trump's war with Iran has cost American drivers an estimated \$101 billion more at the pump, or \$856 for the average family. Gas remains above \$4.30 a gallon, the highest it has ever been at this time of year and the first October on record above \$4. Gas is still roughly 50 percent above the price drivers were paying in the days before Trump's war began, and diesel is running above \$6 a gallon, driving up the cost of shipping everything from groceries to building materials.

Electricity bills and home heating.

Household electric bills are up around 15 percent nationally since Trump took office again. American families paid \$110 more for electricity in 2025 under Trump than in 2024 and have paid \$130 more in just the first seven months of 2026. Home heating oil costs have hit a record high amid Trump's war with Iran, and families who heat with oil are projected to spend 21 percent more this winter nationwide, with New England families swallowing a 39 percent hike. Instead of helping, Trump's latest budget proposed eliminating the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) entirely, which helps nearly 6 million households pay their heating bills.

Trump killed energy investments.

Since Trump took office again, \$75.66 billion in energy investments has been lost or delayed thanks to his funding cuts and delays, with 401 projects canceled, delayed, or laying off staff and 42.2 gigawatts of energy capacity lost — enough to power 21.9 million homes — at the very moment families are paying more for every kilowatt they use.

— SECTION 05 · YOUNG AMERICANS

The affordability crisis is hitting *young Americans* the hardest.

Young Americans are trying to start their adult lives in an economy Trump has stacked against them. Among 18-to-29-year-olds, 46 percent [call](#) inflation an urgent national crisis and 40 percent say the same about housing costs, 45 percent are struggling to make ends meet or getting by with little financial security, and just 25 percent approve of the job Trump is doing, matching the low point of his first term. The entry-level job market is the weakest in decades: in 2025, the share of unemployed Americans who are new to the workforce [hit](#) a 37-year high, and recent college graduates [face](#) a 5.6 percent unemployment rate with 42 percent stuck in jobs that do not require their degree. More than half of Gen Z-ers now [juggle](#) a side gig to make ends meet, compared with 21 percent of older adults. After Trump and Republicans ripped away ACA tax credits, 19-to-34-year-olds [account](#) for nearly half of the five million people expected to go uninsured, and the GOP's SNAP cuts [put](#) nearly 3 million young adults ages 18 to 24 at risk of losing food assistance.

— *Trump's student loan overhaul charges young borrowers more.*

The Trump-GOP law [eliminated](#) the income-driven repayment plans millions of borrowers had budgeted around and [replaced](#) them in July with a plan that raises monthly payments for most borrowers, stretches the path to forgiveness to 30 years, and ends the \$0 payment for those earning the least. Trump [restarted](#) wage garnishment on defaulted student loans in January, with more than 5 million borrowers already in default, and nearly 15 percent of 18-to-29-year-olds [saw](#) their credit scores drop 50 or more points in a single year, nearly 50 percent more than the rate for Americans overall, locking them out of apartments, auto loans, and mortgages for years to come.

— *Young Americans are locked out of homeownership.*

The median first-time homebuyer is now 40 years old, an all-time high, and first-time buyers [make up](#) a record-low 21 percent of purchases, half their share in 2007. Only 27 percent of Gen Z adults [own](#) a home, compared with nearly 80 percent of Baby Boomers, and more than 65 percent of Gen Z adults [struggle](#) to afford their rent or mortgage, nearly double the rate for Boomers. Trump [promised](#) to bring mortgage rates back down to 2 percent; instead, the 30-year rate [stands](#) at 7.28 percent, higher than the day he took office.

— SECTION 06 · FAMILIES & FOOD

Raising a family costs *more* under Trump.

The national average price of child care reached \$13,184 a year in 2025, eating up 10 percent of the median income for two-parent households and 33 percent for single parents, and care for two children in a center now costs more than median rent in every state with data and more than in-state college tuition in most. Instead of helping, Trump froze nearly \$2.4 billion in child care and family assistance funding for five states in January, putting care at risk for more than 500,000 children and threatening to push 156,000 mothers of young children out of work, after withholding nearly \$1 billion from Head Start centers in the first months of his term and shuttering half of the program's regional offices.

— *Food costs are up under Trump.*

Americans spent \$310 more on groceries in Trump's first year than in 2024, grocery prices are now more than 4 percent higher than when he took office, ground beef has risen almost every month to a record high of more than \$7 a pound, and coffee now tops \$9 a pound, while restaurant prices are up 3.5 percent over the past year. Trump's tariffs are a major reason, with the tariffs amounting to an \$820 tax increase on the average household this year. Food banks are buying record amounts of food as families pushed off SNAP and squeezed by high prices turn to charity to eat.

— *Help ripped away from American families.*

Trump and Republicans in Congress cut \$187 billion in food assistance, the largest cut to SNAP in the program's history. SNAP participation has already dropped by more than 5 million people, roughly 13 percent, between the law's passage in July 2025 and June 2026, including about 2 million children, with participation falling in every state but Alaska and reaching its lowest point in 17 years. Starting this month, the law cuts the federal share of the cost of running the program, forcing states to pick up the tab, and beginning in October 2027 states will have to pay between 5 and 15 percent of benefit costs themselves for the first time, a bill that will force states to cut benefits, restrict eligibility, or drop out of the program altogether.

SECTION 07 · SMALL BUSINESS & FARMS

Small businesses and farmers are *suffering*.

America's 36.2 million small businesses employ 62.3 million workers, nearly half of the country's workforce, and Trump's trade war has hit them from every direction. 64 percent of Americans say Trump has gone too far on tariffs, up from 58 percent in January, and only about three in ten approve of his handling of trade. The Trump-GOP health care cuts leave roughly 5 million small business owners and self-employed workers facing sharply higher coverage costs or losing coverage altogether.

Trump's trade war is bankrupting farmers.

Farm bankruptcies jumped 46 percent in 2025, the second straight year of increases. After China retaliated against Trump's tariffs by boycotting American soybeans, exports to China fell to about half of the year before, and even the purchases China has promised run 14 percent below the five-year average. Trump's \$12 billion taxpayer-funded bailout did not come close to covering the damage, with soybean farmers losing almost \$75 per acre even after the aid, and Trump's war with Iran sent diesel and fertilizer prices soaring just as farmers headed into planting season.

DEFEND AMERICA ACTION

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Working families across America are paying the price. It's time to fight back.

Defend America Action is a 501(c)(4) organization dedicated to defending working families from the destructive policies of the Trump administration and Congressional Republicans.

Every figure and citation in this report links to its source – from the Joint Economic Committee, KFF, and the Center on Budget & Policy Priorities to Harvard's Joint Center for Housing Studies, the AP-NORC poll, Gallup, Chartis, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

DefendAmericaAction.org

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