

# Affordability really matters

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I have been around politics long enough to know that you can be on the right side of a fight and still lose—at least in the short run. That's what happened in the latest standoff over the shutdown of the federal government, with Democrats fighting to preserve Americans' access to healthcare and food assistance against an unrelenting Republican Party and president who showed there was no apparent limit to the pain they were willing to inflict.

The labor movement repeatedly called for the government to be reopened, federal workers to be paid, and Congress to extend Affordable Care Act subsidies to prevent skyrocketing healthcare premiums from hitting people's pocketbooks on Dec. 31. While we disagreed with the eight Democratic senators who concluded that they had no foreseeable path to victory—given Republicans' willingness to allow Americans to suffer indefinitely—let's place fault where it belongs: with the party that controls all three branches of government and that decided to weaponize hunger and healthcare for political leverage. And let's redouble our efforts to elect leaders who will deliver a better life for all of us, starting with addressing the affordability crisis.

That's the message Americans sent politicians in state and local elections across the country this Election Day. They want their elected officials to lower the cost of living, treat people with dignity and strengthen public schools, not seize power for themselves. Voters supported public education with important school board wins, passage of school funding referendums, and the election of public school supporters over voucher proponents.

Whether a progressive in New York City, a liberal in New Jersey or a moderate in Virginia, successful candidates all had something in common: a relentless focus on what Americans need—a life they can afford, opportunity to get ahead and a real voice in our democracy.

The differences in the style and politics of these winning candidates showed that there is no one-size-fits-all path to victory in statewide or local elections. It takes a big tent to reach and represent our country's diverse electorate in meaningful ways. And we'll need that big tent, because we are in a [moment](#) like never before.

People are being terrorized, assaulted and disappeared off the streets by masked government agents. President Donald Trump is using the Justice Department to persecute his political opponents. He is attempting to force universities, law firms and media companies to bow to his ideological agenda. His draconian cuts to research institutions are sabotaging scientific and medical breakthroughs. He is vilifying and dehumanizing minority groups. He is using the military for domestic control and using the presidency to enrich himself. All with the acquiescence of his party. American democracy is backsliding.

But Americans made clear they want a democracy that honors the rule of law. From California, where voters overwhelmingly supported redrawing its congressional districts in response to Trump's redistricting war, to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court justices who retained their seats—voters supported checks and balances.

And growing numbers of Americans are taking action. From strong turnout in the November elections, to historically high [interest](#) in the 2026 midterm elections with a year to go, to the millions of Americans who attended “No Kings” protests in red, blue and purple parts of the country, Americans are taking a stand.

We must do everything we can to protect people, because the Trump administration and its allies will not. Americans deserve leaders who care about us enough to put politics aside and work toward solutions that improve lives, not shatter them.

We need to call out the lawmakers who took an eight-week paid vacation while air traffic control-

lers and other federal workers went without pay. Lawmakers who stopped food assistance from going to children and families in need, and who created a healthcare crisis that they are about to make significantly worse. They're following the lead of a president who threw a Great Gatsby-themed party the same night he cut nutrition assistance for families and who claims the affordability crisis is a “[con job](#)” created by Democrats.

**Americans want a life they can afford, opportunity to get ahead and a real voice in our democracy.**

Trump's and Republicans' indifference to America's healthcare crisis caused the longest shutdown of the federal government in United States history. Democrats lost the shutdown battle, but they have not given up. They continue to fight to keep premiums from doubling for more than 20 million Americans and to protect access to high-quality, affordable healthcare for all.

Amid today's chaos, cruelty and economic concerns, we need to envision a future in which people see that the American dream is achievable for them. We need to fight for policies, programs and elected officials that enable working people to support themselves and their families without constant struggle and anxiety. We can and must build a better future for all Americans.



Weingarten, second from left, with New York City Mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani, on Nov. 3.

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