

To: Interested Parties

From: Center for American Progress and GBA Strategies

Date: February 1, 2018

RE: AMERICANS OPPOSE PROPOSALS TO RESTRICT ELIGIBILITY AND CUT FUNDING FOR GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

In the aftermath of the recently passed legislation to change the tax system, American voters overwhelmingly reject President Trump's and congressional leader's proposals to restrict eligibility and cut overall funding for a range of government assistance programs. Majorities of American voters across demographic and partisan lines reject plans designed to limit and cut Medicaid, nutrition assistance, affordable housing, and other programs that help provide basic living standards for low-income families. This includes a majority of American voters who are opposed to recent proposals that allow states to deny Medicaid health coverage to working age adults who do not have a job or participate in state-approved work programs.

Many voters view these efforts to cut the safety net as directly linked to and motivated by the need to offset recent tax cuts that primarily benefit corporations and the wealthy. Consequently, majorities of American voters say they are less likely to vote for a congressional candidate who backs these efforts to restrict and reduce a variety of social insurance and benefit programs. Why? This study also finds large percentages of Americans facing serious economic hardship ranging from the lack of a solid paying job to high household costs and debts. In contrast to those who believe our system of social insurance is broken, solid majorities of voters support the basic principle that all people should have access to basic living standards like health care, housing, and nutrition.

These results are based on a comprehensive national poll of 2,350 registered voters, conducted by the Center for American Progress and GBA Strategies from January 24-29, 2018. The survey was conducted by GBA Strategies online among respondents drawn from a custom database of more than six million Americans recruited by phone, online, and through social media. Results are weighted to reflect national demographic statistics for registered voters. The survey carries a margin of error of 2.2 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.

Major findings from this study include:

(1) Large majorities of American voters—across demographic and partisan lines—oppose proposals to restrict eligibility and cut funding for government assistance programs.

The study asked respondents whether they support or oppose a series of proposals recently put forth by President Trump and majority leaders in Congress. Overall, opposition to all but one of these specific ideas ranges from nearly 60 percent to 80 percent of voters.

Most notably, opposition to proposed Medicaid cuts receives the broadest and most intense opposition of any proposal tested in the study. Eighty percent of voters overall oppose the idea of cutting Medicaid, including 56 percent of voters who *strongly* oppose it. And contrary to some of the claims about public support made by the President and congressional leaders, this study also finds that 57 percent of American voters oppose the idea of allowing states to deny Medicaid health benefits to people who do not have a job or participate in state-approved work programs. A similar percentage (57 percent) of voters likewise oppose proposed “block grants” to states.

The only idea under current consideration that receives majority support (59 percent) is a proposal to expand the Earned Income Tax Credit to childless workers.

Q. “Below are some specific policy solutions that have been proposed as part of Republican efforts to restrict eligibility and reduce overall spending on government assistance programs for low-income people. For each one, please tell mark whether you would SUPPORT or OPPOSE that particular policy solution.”

<u>Specific Proposal</u>	<u>Total Support</u>	<u>Total Oppose</u>
Cut funding for Medicaid, which provides health coverage mainly for seniors, people with disabilities, children, and low-income families	20	80
Cut funding and restrict eligibility for Social Security disability programs, which help people with disabilities replace lost wages	22	78
Cut funding for home heating assistance programs for low-income families	22	78
Cut funding for unemployment insurance, which provides temporary income support for workers who have lost their job through no fault of their own	23	77
Cut funding for the Head Start early childhood education program	26	74

Cut funding for programs that provide access to affordable housing	27	73
Cut funding and restrict eligibility for nutrition assistance programs such as food stamps	34	66
Restrict eligibility for health care subsidies under the Affordable Care Act	35	65
Allow states to deny Medicaid health coverage to recipients ages 18 to 64 who do not have a job with a certain amount of hours and do not participate in state-approved work programs	43	57
Consolidate multiple federal anti-poverty programs into "block grants" that replace guaranteed benefits with a set amount of money given to states to spend as they choose	43	57
Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit to include workers who have no children	59	41

Majorities of Trump voters and Republicans oppose 6 of these 11 specific ideas including cuts to Medicaid, housing and heating assistance, Social Security disability, unemployment, and Head Start. Solid majorities of Democrats, Independents, African Americans, Latinos, and white non-college educated voters oppose all of these ideas with the exception of the proposal to expand the Earned Income Tax Credit.

(2) A majority of voters believe the President and congressional Republicans are proposing these restrictions and cuts as a means to pay for the recently passed tax cuts.

The study asked participants to assess the primary rationale for why they think the President and the congressional majority are putting forth these proposed restrictions and cuts to government assistance programs. By a 52 percent-to-45 percent margin, voters overall believe their primary motivation is that, “They do not like these programs for low-income people and want to cut them to help pay for the tax cuts for the wealthy that they recently passed,” rather than their stated position that, “They are concerned that these programs create dependency and they want to make changes to lift more people out of poverty.”

Q. <i>“Which of the following do you think is the primary reason President Trump and Republicans in Congress are trying to restrict eligibility and reduce overall spending on government assistance programs for low-income people?”</i>	<u>Total</u>
They are concerned that these programs create dependency, and they want to make changes to lift more people out of poverty.	45
They do not like these programs for low-income people and want to cut them to help pay for the tax cuts for the wealthy that they recently passed.	52

Similarly, among voters who are opposed to these proposals, 47 percent say their own primary reason for opposing these plans is that, “We shouldn’t cut assistance for struggling families to fund tax breaks that mainly benefit the wealthy and big corporations.” Another 21 percent of opponents believe these proposals “will punish millions of Americans and deny them access to basic living standards”; 17 percent say that it “does nothing to address the real problems of low wages and not enough jobs”; and another 14 percent believe that we “have a moral obligation to help those in need.”

(3) Majorities of American voters say they are less likely to vote for a congressional candidate who supports these proposals to restrict and cut government assistance programs.

Prospective cuts and restrictions to government assistance programs are not well received by many American voters. Participants were asked, “Thinking about the election for Congress later this year, would you be more likely or less likely to vote for a candidate who supports each of the following proposals, or would it make no difference in your vote?” Solid majorities or pluralities of Americans say they are less likely to vote for a candidate who supports the following ideas:

<u>More or less likely to vote for a candidate who supports proposal to...</u>	<u>More likely</u>	<u>Less likely</u>
Cut and restrict eligibility for Social Security disability programs	20	61
Cut funding for Medicaid	19	60
Cut funding for unemployment insurance	20	56

Cut funding for the Head Start early childhood program	20	56
Cut funding for home heating assistance programs	19	56
Cut funding for programs that provide access to affordable housing	22	55
Cut funding and restrict eligibility for nutrition assistance programs	23	54

Among those voters who say they are “almost certain” to vote in 2018, anywhere from 55 percent to 62 percent of them say they are less likely to back a candidate who supports these cuts to the social safety net. The proposed cuts to Social Security disability and Medicaid produce particularly intense opposition, with voters overall saying they are *less* likely to back a candidate supporting these measures by a roughly 60 percent-to-20 percent margin, respectively.

(4) Opposition to these ideas stems from the fact that many Americans continue to face serious economic hardships that limit their access to a secure standard of living.

The survey asked people whether “they or someone in their immediate family have had a serious problem” in the past year with a set of economic challenges. Anywhere from 28 to 48 percent of Americans say that in the past year they or someone in their family have had serious trouble with work, pay, or related household cost and debt issues.

- 48 percent of voters report a serious problem with “finding a decent job with good wages”
- 42 percent of voters report a serious problem “paying a credit card balance”
- 39 percent of voters report a serious problem with “being unable to get medical care because of the cost”
- 39 percent of voters report a serious problem with “having too little money to buy food”
- 36 percent of voters report a serious problem with “falling behind in gas, electric, or phone bills”

- 28 percent of voters report a serious problem with “falling behind in rent or mortgage payments”

A full 70 percent of voters overall report having a serious issue with at least one of these economic challenges, including 61 percent of President Trump’s own voters. Likewise, 40 percent of American voters say that their income falling behind the cost of living, including 43 percent of African American women, 48 percent of non-college educated white women, and 57 percent of Latino women.

Notably, younger Americans ages 18-34 report significantly higher rates of serious problems in all of these areas. For example, 71 percent of voters ages 18-34 report serious problems finding a decent job with good wages compared to 48 percent of voters overall, and 57 percent of younger voters report serious problems getting medical care because of the cost compared to 39 percent of voters overall.

(5) American voters strongly support the principles and reasons for maintaining a robust set of social insurance programs for families.

In addition to concrete hardships many voters continue to face, American voters of all stripes believe in the foundations of Americans social insurance programs. By a 55 percent-to-27 percent margin, voters agree more with the statement, “The government should help ensure that all families have access to basic living standards like health care, nutrition, and housing if their wages are too low or they can’t make ends meet,” versus the notion that, “Welfare programs trap people in poverty by leaving them dependent on the government and penalizing work.”

By a 60 percent-to-20 percent margin, voters agree more that, “It is more important to me to help provide basic living standards like housing, nutrition, and health care for those struggling to make ends meet,” rather than an alternative, “It is more important to me to address large budget deficits by reducing overall spending on government assistance programs for low-income people.”

Sixty-five percent of voters believe that, “Even if I may not need them now, I’m glad our society provides government services to ensure basic living standards for when times get tough,” in contrast to 19 percent of voters who say, “I don’t envision ever being in a position where I would need or want to use the health care, nutrition, housing, or income support provided by the government. “

In terms of the causes of poverty, voters by a 59 percent-to-22 percent margin believe that, “Most people who live in poverty are poor because their jobs don’t pay enough, they lack good health care and education, and things cost too much for them to save and move ahead,” versus the alternative argument that, “Most people who live in poverty are poor because they make bad decisions or act irresponsibly in their own lives.”

<p><i>After reading both statements, please indicate whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.</i></p>	<p><u>Total closer to view</u></p>
<p>The government should help ensure that all families have access to basic living standards like health care, nutrition, and housing if their wages are too low or they can't make ends meet.</p>	<p>55</p>
<p>Welfare programs trap people in poverty by leaving them dependent on the government and penalizing work.</p>	<p>27</p>
<p>It is more important to me to help provide basic living standards like housing, nutrition, and health care for those struggling to make ends meet.</p>	<p>60</p>
<p>It is more important to me to address large budget deficits by reducing overall spending on government assistance programs for low-income people.</p>	<p>20</p>
<p>Even if I may not need them now, I'm glad our society provides government services to ensure basic living standards for when times get tough.</p>	<p>65</p>
<p>I don't envision ever being in a position where I would need or want to use the health care, nutrition, housing, or income support provided by the government.</p>	<p>19</p>
<p>Most people who live in poverty are poor because their jobs don't pay enough, they lack good health care and education, and things cost too much for them to save and move ahead.</p>	<p>59</p>

Most people who live in poverty are poor because they make bad decisions or act irresponsibly in their own lives.	22
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(6) Americans overwhelmingly back more promising proposals to put people directly to work, invest in our communities, and provide more economic security for families.

The survey presented a series of alternative proposals to Trump’s and congressional majority leaders’ ideas for restricting eligibility and cutting funding for government assistance programs centered on direct investments in jobs and economic opportunities for all Americans. Anywhere from 7 in 10 to more than 8 in 10 American voters support the following alternative proposals.

- *Invest \$1 trillion over next five years on comprehensive infrastructure needs including physical infrastructure like roads, bridges, airports and public transport; energy infrastructure to increase production and use of clean energy; and human infrastructure to help workers with good jobs that pay decent wages, affordable education, and child care support (81 percent total support)*
- *Enact basic family-friendly policies including paid family and medical leave and paid sick days for workers (80 percent total support)*
- *If individuals receiving government assistance to make ends meet can’t find work, the government should hire them directly to work rebuilding roads, bridges, and schools or training them to be teachers, home health care aides, or child care providers (79 percent total support)*
- *Help low wage workers afford quality child care and make universal pre-kindergarten available for all children (78 percent total support)*
- *For workers who lose their jobs to foreign competition, automation, or relocation, provide a salary and tuition to receive hands-on training in new skills and technology needed to fill available jobs in their communities (77 percent total support)*
- *Create wage boards that bring together businesses, government, and workers to ensure fair wages for employees across a specific industry and prevent employers from abusing the availability of cheap labor to drive down wages (77 percent total support)*
- *Ensure that all young people aged twenty-five or under are placed in a job, an apprenticeship, or enrolled in continuing education toward a specific vocation within six months of leaving school or a job (76 percent total support)*

- *Expand rental assistance for all low-income families spending more than half of their income on rent each month (72 percent total support)*

Instead of punitive measures designed to reduce Americans access to a solid standard of living, and cut necessary benefits for low-income and other Americans, this study finds clear evidence that voters are ready to back bold ideas on jobs, investments, and other economic security measures.

President Trump and congressional leaders would be wise to consider these ideas and opinions when making decisions about upcoming budget tradeoffs and priorities.