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Hours Before Shutdown Deadline, Health Care Fight Keeps Congress at a Standstill

With a shutdown set to begin October 1, Republicans push for a “clean” funding bill while Democrats demand protections for Obamacare subsidies and Medicaid. The standoff leaves agencies and territories bracing for furloughs and delays.

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Editor's note: This article will be updated during the day as talks and negotiations to avert a government shutdown continue through the day.

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With only hours to go before the federal government officially runs out of funding, lawmakers on Capitol Hill remain deadlocked over health care provisions after a Monday afternoon meeting with the White House.

The primary impasse centers on health care funding and policy changes, specifically Democrats' demands to include provisions in any short-term funding bill, known as a continuing resolution (CR), that would extend expiring Affordable Care Act (ACA, or Obamacare) subsidies—estimated by the Congressional Budget Office to cost over \$1 trillion over 10 years—and reverse Republican-led cuts to Medicaid and other health programs enacted earlier in 2025.

Republicans, who control both chambers of Congress and the White House under President Trump, are pushing for what they call a “clean” CR that would simply extend current funding levels through November 21, 2025, without these additions. That bill passed the House largely along party lines but failed in the Senate on a 44-48 procedural vote September 19, where Democrats united in opposition. GOP leaders, including Senate Majority Leader John Thune, argue that a clean CR avoids “unreasonable concessions” and buys time for broader negotiations. Democrats, however, view it as enabling further erosion of health protections.

The fight has sharpened partisan rhetoric. Republicans have framed Democratic opposition as extreme, with some, such as Senator John Barrasso, accusing Democrats of holding up funding to secure “free health care for illegal immigrants.” Democrats have rejected the claim, noting their explicit conditions revolve around protecting ACA subsidies for legal residents and undoing Medicaid cuts, not expanding benefits for undocumented immigrants.

Instead of progress, the blame game continued Monday. Vice President JD Vance said, “We're headed to a shutdown because the Democrats won't do the right thing. I hope they change their mind.” Senate Democrats countered that with Republicans holding unified control of government, the responsibility rests on them. “When I was leader, we negotiated four times with Republicans, and we never had a shutdown,” said Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer. “It's up to the Republicans whether they want a shutdown or not.”

Although Republicans hold the presidency and majorities in both chambers, Senate rules require 60 votes to advance most legislation, including continuing resolutions. With only a slim GOP majority, party leaders still need some Democratic support to overcome a filibuster and send a funding measure to the President's desk.

In the Virgin Islands, a federal shutdown could bring significant disruptions, including furloughs, delayed aid, and stalled recovery projects. Still, during Monday's press briefing, Government House Communications Director Richard Motta tried to reassure residents. “In the six and a half years that this administration has taken shape, we've seen this happen a number of times,” he said. “Most of those impacts have been fairly minimal, and have been resolved long before any long-term impacts could be realized on the local side.” He acknowledged, however, that pay for federal employees residing in the territory and other government operations would be disrupted.

While senators continued exchanging rhetorical broadsides, the House remained on break. Speaker Mike Johnson has not recalled the chamber, and as of Tuesday morning there was no indication he would do so before the October 1 deadline.

Schumer suggested that President Trump may eventually be open to a compromise after Monday's meeting, which he claimed showed the President was not fully aware of the consequences of letting ACA subsidies expire. “It seemed from his body language and some of the things he said

that he was not aware of the ramifications,” Schumer said.

Still, the White House position remains that Democrats must first agree to keep the government funded before Mr. Trump considers any deal on health care. House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries rejected that scenario outright. “We're not going to support a partisan spending bill that continues to gut the healthcare of everyday Americans,” he said.

Unless a breakthrough emerges, the government is set to shut down at 12:01 a.m. on October 1, 2025

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