

What's Driving The Shutdown?

The current shutdown has been a long time coming all year. Back in March, Schumer's decision to cooperate to keep the government open drew backlash from the left and talk of a primary challenge from AOC. It seemed obvious he wasn't going to be able to do it a second time. After Schumer proposed a temporary fix to keep the government open in late September, the reaction from progressives was [described](#) as "open mutiny." One House Democrat [told Axios](#) that "I think it's pretty safe to say that if Schumer folded and got nothing in return before [Oct. 1], he might as well just go to the UPS store and grab a U-Haul and clean out his office."

Democrats say their motivation is the ACA subsidies, but there are two reasons we think the strategy is driven by other factors.

1.) It's all about the base.

2024 exit polls showed that liberal Democrats only comprised 16% of the electorate, but the progressive base is their source of fundraising and grassroots activists determined to show they are fighting against the President. Recent [quotes](#) from House Democrats:

- | | 2020 | 2024 |
|--------------------------|------|------|
| Conservative Republicans | 26% | 24% |
| Liberal Democrats | 17% | 16% |
| Everyone Else | 57% | 60% |
- "The base would be incensed if Schumer was seen as capitulating again."
 - "Obviously the base of the party wants to see that we're not going along."
 - "I think people understand there would be hell to pay if we don't put up a fight, but I also think this is a place where most members and the base authentically align."

Schumer seems convinced his strategy is working, stating "[every day gets better for us.](#)" Getting better for whom? For demoralized Democrats, the shutdown has provided some new life. As one example, the "No Kings Day of Action" is planned for October 18 and is advertised as the largest peaceful protest in American history. To put their base strategy in context, in 2024 the liberal Democratic base comprised 16% of the electorate, with conservative Republicans at 24% and everyone else — those who don't identify with either party's base — at 60%, up from 57% in 2020.

2.) Shifting the topic to an issue that favors Democrats — health care.

While Democrats insist their motivation is health care, the current playbook for the 2026 midterms looks very similar to their strategy from 2018. In that election, Democrats tried to keep the focus on health care/pre-existing conditions and off of the economy — the strongest issue for Republicans. In that election, Republicans didn't effectively sell their tax bill (the 2017 TCJA) and harness a good economy as a campaign message, and instead closed on immigration, specifically the "caravan." This allowed pre-existing conditions to emerge as the centerpiece of the 2018 election.

In 2018, Democrats were successful in shifting the topic to more favorable terrain, and it seems they are trying to do the same again. As we've seen all summer, Democrats have been trying to reframe the tax bill in terms of health care, focusing on the Medicaid components. Do Republicans allow this to happen again this time?

For more shutdown analysis, see David's latest Roll Call column [Voters hate shutdowns.](#)

Have a good weekend.

David & Myra