



V for Vampire Vought's Vendetta

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Cover Photo: *“Meeting with Director Russ Vought” by U.S. Department of Homeland Security, September 18, 2025, United States Government Work*

Introduction

From expressing his desire to put federal workers “[in trauma](#)” to [crafting](#) Project 2025, the Heritage Foundation’s right-wing playbook for a second Trump administration, Russell Vought, Trump’s director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), hasn’t exactly been subtle about his vision to reshape the federal government into an omnipotent white Christian nationalist regime. He has, however, been careful to avoid taking ownership of his ideas in the public limelight.

As our Kenny Stancil [wrote](#) for Revolving Door Project’s Watchdog Weekly newsletter, Vought is the gatekeeper of the federal money spigot and the central braintrust behind the Trump administration’s systematic dismantling of critical federal agencies. Voughtism has already succeeded in [demoralizing](#) the federal workforce and [inflicting harms](#) on public health and safety. Matters only stand to get worse. And yet, Vought has strategically evaded accountability for his [scythe-swinging](#) demolition agenda by using other Trump administration officials as his mouthpiece.

Case in point: Elon Musk [served as the face](#) for the administration’s Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) while Vought [operated in the shadows](#), resulting in [mass layoffs](#) of federal employees and the gutting of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (which is responsible for [protecting consumers](#) from corporate financial interests’ unfair, deceptive, or abusive practices), among [other consequences](#). DOGE’s slash-and-burn assault on federal agencies and workers was Vought’s Project 2025 [in action](#). Although Musk’s team officially disbanded in November 2025, Vought [continues](#) to wield a bludgeon to the federal government à la DOGE.

Vought has also been executing his agenda to shore up power through another means: a fiscal retaliation campaign against Trump’s perceived political enemies. This campaign has seen federal funding for education, food, health, transportation, and other life-affirming programs be [cut, frozen, or withheld](#) in Democratic-led cities and states.

Just like with Musk and DOGE, Vought has relied on a sprawling cast of characters within the administration, including Donald Trump himself and Vice President JD Vance, as masks for this cruelty, framing the initiative as a war on “wokeism,” a war on “fraud,” or both, depending on the context. Such actions are likely illegal, but while the public waits for courts to potentially catch up, millions of Americans are already dealing with the fallout and stand to suffer even more material harms, rendering legal relief too little, too late.

War on “Wokeism”

Vought has long championed “anti-woke” culture, [popularizing](#) the phrase “woke and weaponized” to describe anyone who is not aligned with the conservative movement. In late 2022, Center for Renewing America (CRA), a right-wing think tank [founded by](#) Vought in 2021, [issued](#) Vought’s 2023 budget proposal, wherein he advocated for a purge of “woke” ideology from across the entire federal apparatus (the “2023 budget proposal”). His [proposal](#) casts anyone who “emphasizes social justice, progressive dogma, and climate issues” as woke, effectively villainizing critical race theory, gender studies, and climate activism.

CRA’s 2023 Annual Report [stated](#) that Vought’s 2023 budget proposal would serve as a bedrock “for years to come on how conservatives can end the woke and weaponized bureaucracy through the power of the purse in Congress.” Certainly, these ideas have seeped into the second Trump administration.

Crusade Against Higher Education in Blue States

Vought’s 2023 budget proposal [lamented](#) that “colleges and universities are no longer institutions of academic rigor, freedom of inquiry, or speech,” arguing that they have been captured by “woke administrators” and are “now little more than an indoctrination camp.” He [called](#) for an urgent restoration of “value in higher education.” Consistent with this, the Heritage Foundation’s Project Esther, which is effectively “[an addendum to](#)

[Project 2025](#),” established a blueprint for stripping universities of federal funding to stamp out the pro-Palestinian movement. Together, Vought’s 2023 budget proposal and Project Esther laid the foundations for the Trump administration’s crusade against post-secondary institutions.

According to a *New York Times* [investigation](#), Department of Justice (DOJ) lawyers were given a directive shortly after Trump’s return to the White House, instructing them to initiate investigations into universities for alleged antisemitism as part of what would become a wider retaliatory crackdown against political opponents. “We were only told to investigate cases that were in blue states, and cases or investigations involving red states or that didn’t involve perceived political enemies of the administration never moved forward,” Ejaz Baluch Jr., an ex-DOJ attorney who left his position in May 2025, [told](#) the *Times*. “There was no interest in antisemitism unless it involved protests of Israel or the war in Gaza.”

This probe into higher education institutions in Democratic-led states proved ruthless. In March 2025, the Trump administration [cut](#) \$400 million in funding to New York’s Columbia University for purportedly not doing enough to crush student-led Palestine solidarity encampments in the wake of Israel’s genocide in Gaza (an absurd accusation given that Columbia summoned the New York police department to [mass arrest](#) student activists in spring 2024 under the Biden administration and suspended countless protestors).

In July 2025, Columbia [agreed](#) to pay a \$221 million settlement to the federal government and implement sweeping reforms to campus safety and disciplinary processes in exchange for reinstatement of its federal grants. But by then, considerable damage had already been done.

The cuts greatly [jeopardized](#) medical and scientific research at Columbia on cancer, diabetes, and other life-threatening conditions, forcing some projects to be suspended. “Honestly, I wanted to cry,” Kathleen Graham, a nurse, [told](#) the *New York Times* after

learning a diabetes study she had participated in for over two decades was being pulled. Dr. David M. Nathan, who was working on that same study, [told](#) the *Times* that the latest phase, which was examining links between diabetes and dementia, was only two years into a five-year planned project. “This is also colossally wasteful,” he [said](#). And in May 2025, Columbia [announced](#) that it was axing 180 researchers due to the federal grant terminations.

In the meantime, Columbia also [adopted](#) a new disciplinary process, under which it expelled and suspended over 70 students involved in a Palestine solidarity demonstration in May, [significantly impacting](#) their ([costly](#)) education, housing, relationships, and future careers, all in the name of appeasing Trump. Yasmine (pseudonym), one of the suspended students, [spoke to](#) *Mondoweiss* news about missing her classes and wondering what her future would look like without a degree or stable income. Similar concerns of uncertainty were [echoed](#) by other students.

The Trump administration’s crusade, however, did not start and stop with Columbia. Also in March 2025, the administration [froze \\$1 billion](#) for New York’s Cornell University and [suspended \\$175 million](#) for Pennsylvania’s University of Pennsylvania. The next month, it [pulled \\$790 million](#) from Illinois’ Northwestern University, [froze](#) \$2.2 billion in grants to Massachusetts’ Harvard University, [suspended \\$210 million](#) for New Jersey’s Princeton University, and [froze \\$510 million](#) for Rhode Island’s Brown University. In each instance, the administration [accused](#) the institutions of tolerating antisemitism and [demanded](#) an end to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs, consistent with Vought’s 2023 budget proposal [expressing a strong aversion](#) to DEI. Later, the administration [froze \\$584 million](#) for California’s UCLA over alleged antisemitism and civil rights violations. This was despite UCLA [mobilizing](#) police against students participating in Palestine solidarity encampments and allegedly neglecting to protect students from a violent mob of Zionist counterprotestors in 2024.

As with Columbia, the Trump administration's freezing frenzy [resulted in disruptions](#) to Harvard engineering, medical, and science projects focused on a broad spectrum of issues, including chemotherapy and pandemic preparedness; put people's salaries at risk; and led to [layoffs](#). Rita Hamad, director of Harvard's Social Policies for Health Equity Research Center, which was working on projects like studying the effect of school segregation on heart health, [told](#) the *Associated Press*, "It's all just a mixture of frustration and anger and sadness all the time, every day." Researchers at hospitals affiliated with Harvard were [not spared](#) the White House's wrath either.

Cole Peters, a cancer researcher at UCLA, [told](#) *LAist*, an independent, nonprofit newsroom, that by interrupting funding, research studies "really gets set back by multiple years, not a couple months."

And at the University of Pennsylvania, departments were [given the green light](#) to renege on informal offers to Ph.D. students at the School of Arts & Sciences, the institution's biggest school with programs [spanning](#) the liberal arts, humanities, and sciences. "One person was in tears," Wendy Roth, a sociology professor and chair of graduate education, [told](#) the *New York Times*. "It's just the most terrible thing to get that kind of news when your plans are made."

Comparable ripple effects were experienced at [Brown](#), [Cornell](#), [Northwestern](#), and [Princeton](#).

In September 2025, a federal judge [ruled](#) that the Trump administration's actions affecting Harvard were illegal, referring to them as part of a "targeted, ideologically-motivated assault." Yet, this victory did not rectify the wreckage caused in the interim. The fight is also far from over. On March 20, 2026, the Trump administration sued Harvard, [alleging](#) the university had violated Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by demonstrating "deliberate indifference" to antisemitism. The lawsuit is seeking to rescind all federal funding, including Pell Grants, a form of federal aid for students with [exceptional financial need](#), and federal student loans—a direct application of Vought's

2023 budget proposal, which [insists on](#) the complete annihilation of the federal student loan program.

As for [UCLA](#), it won a court order restoring frozen federal grants, and [Princeton](#) saw half of its grants reinstated following conversations with the White House.

Meanwhile, [Brown](#), [Cornell](#), [Northwestern](#), and the [University of Pennsylvania](#) took the same route as Columbia and agreed to settle with the Trump administration.

Evidently, Vought's federal funding freezes have succeeded in coercing universities to surrender to his right-wing fantasies. Beyond that, they have also served as an effective intimidation tactic, prompting other schools to take [preemptive austerity measures](#). The detrimental impacts on researchers and students carry on.

Transportation Infrastructure

\$18 Billion Funding Pause

On the first day of the fall 2025 government shutdown, Vought [announced](#) that the Trump administration was withholding \$18 billion for the New York Hudson Tunnel Project between New Jersey and New York and the Second Avenue Subway project in New York City. The justification [provided](#) was to "ensure funding is not flowing based on unconstitutional DEI principles." Notably, the Trump administration blamed Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, both New York Democrats, for the government shutdown at the time, once again weaponizing federal funding as part of a partisan vindictiveness campaign.

The Hudson Tunnel Project, also known as Gateway, [involved](#) the construction of an additional rail tunnel under the Hudson River to add capacity for commuters on New Jersey Transit and Amtrak trains from New Jersey to New York and vice versa. Around 200,000 people use these transit services on a daily basis and experience constant service disruptions due to [ongoing deterioration](#) of the existing infrastructure. Without a new tunnel, capacity would potentially drop by [75%](#), and commuters [would continue](#) to

face longer, unpredictable, more crowded journeys, cutting into what little personal and family time they already have. Displaced commuters would be forced to travel by car, a [more costly, less climate-friendly](#) endeavor. Public health would also take a [nosedive](#) due to the physical and mental stress of navigating unreliable commutes.

In February 2026, the Trump administration [released](#) millions in funding for the project per a federal court order. But during the nearly five months the funding was withheld, 1,000 workers were [laid off](#) and millions of dollars in extra costs accumulated. Once funding was restored, employees were brought back to resume construction work.

As for the Second Avenue Subway project, it was [intended](#) to extend subway service access to Manhattan's East Side residents and workers. A section of the project designed to expand service for historically neglected neighborhoods like East Harlem was [described](#) by Mitchell Moss, an urban planning professor at New York University, as the "first major project that isn't serving Manhattan's elite."

Indeed, the East Harlem community, which is [mostly Latin](#), has long championed the initiative. "I think that it's sad that it's taken this long," one resident, Princess Jenkins, [told](#) the *New York Times* back in 2022. "We want people to be able to access this community."

Residents feel just as passionate about the project today. "It's unfortunate our current president, who used to be a resident here in this very city, is making us suffer because they're not getting along in Washington," community member Danielle McKinnon [told](#) the *City*, a New York-based newsroom. "All we have here is surface transit and it would be so much easier to have subway transit."

"This should have been done already," another resident, Gregory Forbes, [told](#) the *City*. "It wouldn't be as crowded on the 4, 5 and 6 lines—it would be a help, a very big help."

In March 2026, New York’s Metropolitan Transportation Agency [sued](#) the Trump administration over its funding freeze for the Second Avenue Subway. The next month, the federal government [agreed to release](#) the frozen funds.

\$2.1 Billion Funding Pause

Two days after targeting New York and New Jersey, Vought went after Illinois. He [announced](#) that \$2.1 billion were being withheld from Chicago’s Red Line Extension (RLE) and Red and Purple Modernization (RPM) projects “to ensure funding is not flowing via race-based contracting.”

The RLE project is [designed](#) to bring train service to around [100,000 people](#) in underserved communities with a [majority Black population](#) in Chicago’s Far South Side. Ted Villaire, director of communications at Active Transportation Alliance (Active Trans), a Chicago-based organization committed to racial equity in transit, [wrote](#): “There is broad community support for the project, bolstered by the understanding that extending CTA’s L system to the far South Side will improve residents’ access to education, employment, healthcare, and other crucial services. The Red Line Extension will also attract construction jobs and future development along the proposed corridor.”

As for the RPM project, its purpose is to [revitalize and rebuild](#) the Red and Purple transit lines in Chicago’s North Side. “Without more investment, crowding on North Side trains is only going to get worse and some people may choose to drive if they begin to view it as more convenient. RPM relieves congestion in the biggest choke point in our transit system while ensuring public transit will remain an affordable, fast and convenient option,” [said](#) former Active Trans government relations director Kyle Whitehead in an email statement.

The deprivation of funding for both the RLE and RPM projects “threatens jobs, economic development, and the livelihood of hardworking Americans who rely on public transit every day,” [wrote](#) Democratic Illinois lawmakers.

In March 2026, a federal judge [granted](#) a temporary restraining order against the Trump administration to lift its funding suspension for the projects, allowing them to proceed after much delay.

“It’s been needed a long time, so I’m looking forward,” Beverly Martin, a resident in Chicago’s Far South Side, [told](#) CBS News.

“I won’t always have to drive everywhere and I can just get on the train,” Martin’s sister and fellow Far South Side resident, Muriel Stansberry, [added](#). “It’ll be easier to reach relatives and our shopping. So, I’m looking forward to it; just looking forward to something new, something that’s going to benefit everybody. You know, not just a few people, but a lot of people.”

\$11 Billion Funding Pause

In October 2025, Vought also [announced](#) that the Army Corps of Engineers was pausing more than \$11 billion for projects in Democratic-led cities including New York, San Francisco, Boston, and Baltimore. [States](#) like Delaware, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, and Rhode Island were similarly impacted.

The projects subject to the funding block [include](#) water and wastewater systems in New York, a waterfront park in San Francisco, and bridge expansions in Cape Cod, Massachusetts.

“These projects are not designed to benefit one party, but to improve our nation’s infrastructure, boost economic growth, and embrace quality of life for all Americans—regardless of political affiliation. Freezing these projects will only result in unnecessary delays, more congestion, and substantial job losses,” Democratic lawmakers [wrote](#) to Vought.

It is [still unclear](#) what other projects are paused.

War on “Fraud”

Vought’s war on “wokeism” has been accompanied by his war on “fraud.” DOGE [was an early manifestation](#) of MAGA’s [sham concern](#) for eliminating “waste, fraud, and abuse.” Vought’s fiscal retaliation campaign against Trump’s political enemies is a continuation. In practice, Vought’s war on “fraud” has taken the form of going after essential public goods and services that uplift working people.

Child Care

Vought’s 2023 budget proposal [emphasized](#) making changes to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) by “reducing and eliminating ineffective and questionable programs along with curbing agency subdivisions that reward the political left at the expense of the national interest.” It also [called](#) on states to “focus their efforts on moving recipients of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) off of welfare and into work,” signaling support for reducing the TANF block grant and contingency fund, and recommended a discontinuation of the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG).

All of the above is now being pursued through Vought’s war on “fraud.”

Much like how Minnesota served as the [test ground](#) for the Trump administration’s aggressive immigration crackdown, the Democratic-led state has become the guinea pig for Vought’s campaign.

In December 2025, the Trump administration [froze \\$185 million](#) in child day care center funds for Minnesota. The decision was made amid fraud allegations stemming from a right-wing influencer’s video accusing day care centers of accepting government assistance without providing child care services, a claim that has been [debunked](#).

The following month, the Trump administration [froze](#) around \$10 billion for five Democratic-led states, California, Colorado, Illinois, Minnesota, and New York, due to

“fraud” concerns. Like in Minnesota, however, there is [no evidence](#) that fraud is taking place in the other four states.

The freeze applies to [three programs](#) overseen by the administration’s ACF—Child Care and Development Fund, TANF, and SSBG.

All three programs [assist](#) hundreds of thousands of low-income households with children, not just for child welfare but also for [foster care](#) services.

The likely consequences of Vought’s fiscal retaliation campaign are harrowing. “Many of the families at my center are one paycheck away from becoming homeless. If child care assistance is turned off, children can’t come to care, that means their parents can’t go to work,” Maria Snider, director of a Minnesota child care center, [told](#) the *Imprint* news publication. “I’m genuinely scared for what can happen next if funding is stopped. I can’t help but think this is part of a larger designed plan and strategy to cut public funding.”

The Campaign for Children, an advocacy organization for children, [said](#) in a statement: “A blanket freeze on needed assistance for children and their families will at best cause confusion and uncertainty, and at worst, will result in the closure of child care providers, the loss of jobs for both child care professionals and parents, and a reduction in quality care for kids.”

In April 2026, a federal court [temporarily blocked](#) the Trump administration from freezing the more than \$10 billion in child care and family assistance funding in a lawsuit brought by unions and small businesses.

“The families I serve in Palmdale, California often commute 90+ minutes to and from work daily. For these janitors, grocery store workers, and delivery drivers, access to child care is the difference between putting food on the table and going hungry. Child care also means peace of mind; the parents I support know their children are safe and learning while they work. When Trump attacked child care, he underestimated what providers mean to the families we serve, and our resolve in fighting back,” Wendy

Bobadilla, a child care provider in Palmdale, California who is a member of Child Care Providers United and the SEIU Local 99 union, [said](#) in response to the court's order.

A separate ongoing lawsuit brought by the five affected states also won a [preliminary injunction](#) to stop the Trump administration from implementing the ACF's funding policy and to remove award restrictions.

Medicaid

Medicaid, which [provides](#) full or partial health coverage to people with low incomes and resources, has also been swept up in Vought's war on "fraud." Again, Vought's 2023 budget proposal previewed this when he [wrote](#) about his concerns that "[r]ecent estimates suggest that as much as one-quarter of all Medicaid spending falls into the category of improper payments, in large part because states do not properly ensure all individuals enrolled in Medicaid are eligible for benefits." He also complained that a [50% floor](#) that requires the federal government to pay for at least half of a state's Medicaid costs "encourages wealthy, liberal states...to keep expanding their Medicaid programs."

Just as fraud has been weaponized by the Trump administration against Minnesota with respect to child care services, so too has it been weaponized against Medicaid in Minnesota.

In January 2026, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) took a [compliance action](#) against Minnesota to withhold up to \$2 billion annually in federal Medicaid matching funds.

And in February 2026, \$259.5 million in Medicaid funding was [withheld](#) from Minnesota, with JD Vance tapped as the face of Vought's fiscal retaliation campaign this time. The administration also threatened that \$1 billion could be withheld over the next year.

It is especially telling that while the White House decries alleged fraud in Minnesota, it has seemingly memory-holed the alleged fraud engineered by Senator Rick Scott (R-FL),

a Trump sycophant. Scott was the [head](#) of hospital chain Columbia/HCA in the late 1990s when it was accused of [systematically defrauding](#) Medicaid, Medicare, and other federally funded health care programs. The chain paid an historic \$1.7 billion settlement. If the Trump administration was truly concerned about fraud, it would be going after companies like Scott's, not [pardoning](#) corporate executives convicted of medical fraud.

Hypocrisy aside, Vought's political persecution comes at the expense of the [1.2 million](#) low-income individuals enrolled in Medicaid in Minnesota.

"Medicaid is a powerful force for good in communities across our country. It covers health screenings, cancer treatment, prenatal care, mental health services, nursing home care, home and community-based services, and a variety of other benefits that allow millions of people to access the care they need to live with dignity," [said](#) Sarah Somers, Legal Director at National Health Law Program, a group of lawyers and policy experts dedicated to advancing health rights in the U.S. "Exaggerated fraud claims are being used as a fig leaf to disguise cuts to Medicare and Medicaid, and to intimidate states. When the federal government withholds funding or freezes parts of the program, it creates instability that hurts people first. Families miss appointments. Providers question whether they can continue services. Communities lose trusted sources of care."

"Medicaid ensures Minnesotans who have physical or developmental disabilities get care and supports they need so they can live independently, with dignity, and contribute to their communities," a nonpartisan coalition group that advocates for Medicaid beneficiaries in Minnesota [wrote](#) in a statement. "Stripping funding from these types of basic health needs is simply cruel."

The National Alliance on Mental Illness Minnesota added to the chorus of concerns, [saying](#) that the federal government's actions would "disproportionately harm people living with mental illnesses who depend on Medicaid for access to treatment,

medications, housing supports and essential community-based services. Medicaid is the largest payer of mental health services in Minnesota. It is not a political bargaining chip; it is a lifeline.”

In April 2026, a federal court [refused](#) to issue a preliminary injunction blocking the Trump administration from halting Medicaid reimbursements to Minnesota, a huge slap in the face to those most in need.

Public Health Programs

“Wokeism” and “fraud” are overlapping, sometimes synonymous, categories in the right’s crusade against political opponents.

As part of Vought’s commitment to “removing the scourge of woke” in the federal government, his 2023 budget proposal [advocated](#) for refocusing the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) mission away from “woke public health policies” like “health equity.” Couched within this was his proposal for deprioritizing work aimed at preventing sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). He [wrote](#), “The agency’s current ‘health equity’ agenda siphons substantial resources in the name of a woke political agenda for niche and small population groups at the expense of broader public health.”

In service of Vought’s wishes, the Trump administration [cut \\$600 million](#) in CDC grants for public health programs in the following Democratic-run states: California, Colorado, Illinois, and Minnesota. The grants were earmarked for [programs like](#) HIV surveillance, increasing the use of HIV prevention medication among Black women, and research studies on populations disproportionately affected by STDs.

These award cancellations are not just an extension of Vought’s war on “wokeism” but also of his complementary war on “fraud.” To be sure, an OMB spokesman [told](#) ABC News that the funding cuts were aimed at states with a “history of fraud and mismanagement.”

While the cuts appear targeted against specific minority communities, Elizabeth Finley, director of communications of National Coalition of STD Directors, a group of state health department STD officials, [explained](#) to the *New York Times* that the funding cuts will have consequences for all people. “Every person benefits from the surveillance work that tracks infections and helps people understand their risk,” she [told](#) the *Times*. “Every person is equally served by the availability of information or outbreak prevention services.”

Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Ranking Member on the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee for Labor, Health, and Human Services, and Education, similarly [said](#) in a statement, “Diseases don’t stop spreading at state lines or care what political party you are. Taking away this funding for these communities makes all Americans less safe and puts the health of all Americans at risk.”

In February 11, 2026, the four affected states [initiated](#) a lawsuit against Vought in his official capacity as OMB Director and other defendants to block the Trump administration from cancelling their public health funding (the “*Illinois v. Vought*” suit). A federal judge [granted](#) the states a preliminary injunction to enjoin the government from halting their health funding and voided the grant terminations.

Even with a victory like this, repeated pauses in federal funding still [risk](#) seriously collapsing the public health system. As Max Crowley, professor of Human Development, Family Studies and Public Policy at Penn State, [wrote](#) for the *Conversation*: “Policy priorities will always evolve. Courts review executive actions. Congress revisits allocations. Change is part of governance. But if policymakers want stronger, more resilient public health infrastructure, stability is not simply administrative convenience. It is part of the foundation that makes prevention and preparedness possible.”

Food

Vought's 2023 budget proposal [called for](#) reforming the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), including eliminating the minimum benefit, "to move people out of dependency and back toward the dignity of work." (The minimum monthly benefit for eligible one- and two-person households in fiscal year 2026 was [\\$24](#).)

His vision is being executed through his war on "fraud." In May 2025, the Trump administration announced that states [must share](#) extensive SNAP recipient data ([historically](#), states were only ever required to share randomized samples of data) with the federal government as part of a purported anti-fraud push. When 22 states plus D.C., all with Democratic governors or attorneys general, refused to comply, the administration [said](#) it would withhold money to help maintain SNAP from those jurisdictions. [Affected states](#) included Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Washington, and Wisconsin.

There are [42 million](#) Americans who receive SNAP benefits, most of whom are children, elderly, or people with disabilities in [low-income households](#).

Gina Plata-Nino, the SNAP director at Food Research and Action Center, a group dedicated to fighting poverty-related hunger, [told](#) the *Washington Post* that the Trump administration keeps parroting "there's fraud, waste and abuse, when we do know that that is incorrect."

Even a temporary pause in SNAP benefits means "people can die," Lindsay Allen, a health economist at Northwestern University, [explained](#) to *Stat News*. "Food insecurity in and of itself is a health risk," she added. "As soon as SNAP benefits stop, you see immediate declines in dietary quality and in ongoing nutritional stability."

In February 2026, a federal judge [granted](#) a preliminary injunction against the Trump administration's plans to withhold SNAP funding from states who declined to provide the requested data.

But that's not the end of it. Vought's war on "wokeism" has also been invoked to hold SNAP funding hostage. The Trump administration issued a vague set of conditions for 2026 to [coerce](#) states that are not already ideologically aligned with Trump to certify compliance with "all applicable federal anti-discrimination laws, regulations and policies" and prohibits using funds to "promote gender ideology" or from being "directed towards educational programs that deprive women and girls of fair athletic opportunities." Failure to comply with these arbitrary guidelines [means](#) states risk losing billions of dollars in agricultural and food assistance funding, including for SNAP.

A coalition of 20 Democratic-led states, plus D.C., have once again [sued](#) the Trump administration over these actions, leaving millions of Americans' fates at the mercy of courts (and Vought).

Disaster Relief

Vought's [recommendations for fiscal year 2026 discretionary funding levels](#), which were issued in May 2025, evinced antipathy towards what Vought characterized as "wasteful and woke FEMA grant programs," claiming that "FEMA discriminated against Americans who voted for the President in the wake of recent hurricanes, skipping over their homes when providing aid." (An investigation by FEMA's Office of Professional Responsibility [found](#) "no evidence" that FEMA ordered employees to skip pro-Trump homes when providing assistance to victims of Hurricanes Helene and Milton.)

Perhaps it is no surprise then that in February 2026, the Trump administration [excluded](#) four Democratic-led states—California, Colorado, Illinois, and Minnesota—from the release of more than \$5 billion in overdue disaster aid to states. An [amended complaint](#) filed on March 3, 2026 in the *Illinois v. Vought* lawsuit confirmed that these four states

have not received any of these funds and alleges that lack of disaster aid funding will cause irreparable harm.

According to the amended complaint, without the funds, California's long-term recovery efforts from the [devastating](#) January 2025 Los Angeles wildfires will be [delayed](#), as will refinements to prevention and mitigation strategies for later wildfires, which are only becoming [more and more dangerous](#) due to climate change.

In Colorado, the loss of disaster funds [risks](#) wildfire harm reduction efforts. These funds were meant to go towards [reducing](#) "hazardous fuels along 47 miles of critical road infrastructure and adjacent private properties to provide a safer environment for thousands of residents and businesses" and protecting "critical community infrastructure, including: 41 dams, 35 schools, 15 fire and EMS stations, 4 hospitals, 4 power plants, 3 wastewater treatment plants, and a water treatment plant."

During spring and summer of 2024, Minnesota [experienced severe flooding](#), which left some communities [submerged](#) under water and resulted in damaged homes, businesses, and roads. One year on, communities were [continuing to struggle](#) to recover. According to the state, the delay in federal funding [hampers](#) recovery efforts and improvements to address future natural disasters in the area.

Meanwhile, Illinois has used [past funding](#) "to conduct search and rescue operations in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, provide food aid, debris removal, and permanent work including the repair of roads, bridges, water control facilities, buildings and equipment, utilities, ports, recreational areas, and other physical infrastructure." The loss of disaster recovery funding impedes these efforts, putting people's lives and homes in harm's way.

Crucially, the preliminary injunction granted by the court in March 2026 does not apply to disaster aid funding, meaning disaster recovery and reduction operations in the four states remain handicapped.

Clean Energy

In his [fiscal year 2026 discretionary budget request](#), Vought [vowed](#) to slash funding for Green New Deal programs designed to build climate change resilience, which he referred to as the “Green New Scam.” His proposal recommends [eliminating](#) funds for “unreliable renewable energy.”

Accordingly, during the fall 2025 government shutdown, Vought [canceled \\$7.6 billion](#) in clean energy projects in 16 states that backed Democrat Kamala Harris in the 2024 presidential election. The [affected states](#) were: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington state.

Vought [admitted](#) that the funding was yanked as part of a politically motivated assault against “the Left’s climate agenda.” Indeed, despite the government shutdown at the time, the Department of Energy [remained open and operational](#) due to unexpired finances.

Trump’s political enemies may have been Vought’s intended target, but his real victims were average Americans, especially [low-income communities of color](#), who are increasingly facing the devastating impacts of fossil-fueled climate change. Environmental disasters are becoming [more extreme](#) as a result of climate change, while continued dependence on fossil fuels is leading to [higher costs](#) for consumers.

“This is a shameless and vindictive attack by Director Vought, which will eliminate jobs and raise energy costs for Americans across the country,” [said](#) House Appropriations Committee Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro (D-CT). “This was obviously designed as a political attack by the White House targeting Democrats. But the sad reality is that Americans—the middle class, working class, and vulnerable—who voted for both Democrats and Republicans will be hurt by this. This is divisive, it is petty, and

unfortunately it is exactly what we have come to expect from President Trump and Russ Vought.”

Julie McNamara, associate policy director for the Climate Energy Program at the Union of Concerned Scientists, a nonprofit organization that advocates for a healthy planet, similarly [said](#): “These cuts will increase consumer costs, undermine grid reliability and deepen the nation’s overreliance on harmful fossil fuels. By also slashing support for research and innovation at the frontiers of advanced manufacturing and clean technologies, the Trump administration is hamstringing the country’s capacity to lead on the technologies and jobs of the future.”

In January 2026, a federal judge [ruled](#) that the Trump administration’s actions were illegal and vacated the award cancellations. As of now though, there is [nothing to stop](#) Vought and the Trump administration from re-terminating the funds. In fact, just ten days after the court found the administration’s actions to be unlawful, Vought’s OMB [ordered](#) a federal funding review for fourteen states, plus D.C., “to facilitate efforts to reduce the improper and fraudulent use of those funds[.]” Many of the states subject to this initiative overlap with the states who had their funding for clean energy projects pulled. They [include](#) California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington, all of which supported Harris in 2024.

Electric Vehicle Charging

Vought’s proposal on “Ending the Green New Scam” also seeks to [cancel funds](#) for “wasteful and ineffective [electric vehicle (EV)] charger programs.”

And that’s exactly what the Trump administration has done. The March 3, 2026 amended complaint in *Illinois v. Vought* stated that the administration [canceled \\$900 million](#) in transportation funding to the same four blue state plaintiffs: California, Colorado, Illinois, and Minnesota. This action was allegedly aimed at eviscerating the

Charging and Fueling Infrastructure program, which assists states in [broadening access](#) to EV charging “along major transportation corridors and in underserved communities.”

In Illinois, the funds were [supposed to help](#) “build 14 charging plazas along major freight routes,” whereas in California, Colorado, and Minnesota, they were slated to help build EV chargers that “serve renters, rural drivers, low- and moderate-income neighborhoods, and other areas where drivers cannot charge vehicles overnight in a home or garage.”

Like the billions of dollars in withheld disaster recovery funding, the terminated transportation funding was not covered by the court’s preliminary injunction.

California’s High Speed Rail

In summer 2025, the Trump administration [pulled \\$4.175 billion](#) from California’s high speed rail project, which received California voters’ [stamp of approval](#) to connect Los Angeles and San Francisco by a three-hour train ride powered by [renewable energy](#).

About 62% of California voters continue to want high speed rail, according to 2025 [polling](#) by *Politico*. High speed rail, which is [widely used](#) in other countries, would [expand access](#) to employment opportunities and make travel more affordable and less stressful.

But the deprivation of federal funding puts a major dent in these plans and [risks](#) 15,000 jobs.

California sued the Trump administration to recover the lost funding and later [abandoned](#) the lawsuit, choosing instead to focus its efforts on finding alternative funding sources.

Conclusion: More to Come

Vought’s war on “wokeism” and “fraud,” a thinly veiled way to attack Trump’s political enemies, is set to continue.

Under his leadership, the OMB has submitted a budget request for fiscal year 2027 with a focus on [eliminating](#) “woke” spending. There are no signs that Vought’s war on “fraud” is slowing down either. In fact, it’s ramping up. In March 2026, CMS Administrator Mehmet Oz [sent letters](#) to the Democratic governors of [California](#), [Maine](#), and [New York](#) about alleged Medicaid fraud in their states. Just a week after freezing Medicaid funding in Minnesota, the White House [launched](#) an anti-fraud investigation in New York, threatening to defer Medicaid payments. And in May, Vance announced that the administration was [freezing](#) \$1.3 billion in Medicaid funding to California, citing fraud concerns.

As with Minnesota, the results will likely be catastrophic. Doug Moore, executive director of United Domestic Workers of America, a union that represents home and child care workers, [said](#) in a powerful statement: “It’s clear that the Trump administration is using a politically motivated attack to try and create a fraud scandal where none exists. In the process, the most vulnerable Californians—seniors, people with disabilities, and their caregivers—are being used as political pawns. These are not numbers on a page—these are real people with serious health needs being cast aside for a cheap political stunt. The real scandal is the carelessness with which politicians disregard our community members in order to line the pockets of their billionaire friends. Last year, the Trump administration and Republicans in Congress gave away \$4.5 trillion in tax cuts to millionaires and billionaires, by cutting vital social service programs like Medicaid and SNAP. Our communities rely on these services for survival. Restore the Medicaid funding now and stop playing games with life-saving care.”

Millions of Americans, from students, workers, and educators to children, parents, and elderly, remain caught in the crosshairs as Vought seeks vengeance against those not on board with his ghoulish agenda.