

The Price of Corruption: How Trump's Pay-to-Play Administration is Driving Up Costs for Working Families

Donald Trump campaigned as a populist who would lower costs and fight for working people. Instead, he has spent his second term running the federal government like his family business. More than a year into his administration, the only people who have gotten a better deal are his family, his friends, and his donors. From health care to travel to energy, Trump's corrupt wheelings and dealings have drained money from American families. The pattern is clear: tariff rates that move after gold bars change hands, enforcement actions dropped after seven-figure donations, a pardon handed to a health care fraudster right after his mother wrote a check at Mar-a-Lago. Below are nine policy areas – ripe for further investigation – that have been warped by Trump's corruption.

1. Health care: The Trump administration has put personal and corporate donor profits ahead of patients – and families are paying the price.

- Trump and Congressional Republicans slashed Medicaid and failed to renew health care tax credits, forcing millions of Americans to shell out even more for coverage or forgo it altogether, in order to pay for [tax cuts](#) for the wealthiest individuals and corporations, including [some of his donors](#).
 - Millions of Americans will [spend](#) on average \$2,136 in annual Affordable Care Act (ACA) premiums this year after federal assistance, a 58% hike compared to last year, while in some states Americans are paying up to 220% more.
 - Nearly 5 million Americans [will lose](#) health care coverage this year because Congressional Republicans failed to renew the Premium Tax Credit. Additionally, [at least](#) 115 hospitals and clinics across 32 states have closed or reduced services as a result of the Republican health care cuts.
- Trump is prioritizing profits for Big Pharma – and his own family's pharmaceutical business – instead of working to lower drug prices.

- When Trump rolled out TrumpRX earlier this year, the administration claimed it was a way for Americans to access more affordable prescription drugs. Instead, the platform [fails to disclose](#) information about less expensive generic alternatives and, in some instances, charges consumers more for products that are available for less elsewhere.
- The biggest winners from this scheme are the Trump family and Big Pharma. The platform serves as free advertisement for [Big Pharma](#) and may be lining the pockets of the president's eldest son, [Donald Trump Jr.](#), who is on the board of prescription drug platform BlinkRX, which stands to benefit from the administration's promotion of direct-to-patient medicine sales. BlinkRx donated \$50,000 to the Trump inaugural committee.
- Additionally, when patients use TrumpRx instead of insurance, they have to cover the drug cost themselves – saving money for insurance companies as they continue to rake in premiums.
- Moreover, despite Trump [exempting](#) 17 of the largest pharmaceutical companies from his threatened pharmaceutical tariffs, these firms have continued to [raise](#) prices on nearly 900 different drugs. At least three of these firms – Gilead, Merck, and Pfizer – each [donated](#) \$1 million to the Trump-Vance inaugural committee, alongside the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, which lobbies on behalf of Big Pharma.
- Trump is also working to ensure that big insurance companies and private equity continue to profit at the expense of patients.
 - Health care companies, some of Trump's biggest fans, [donated](#) nearly \$11 million to his inaugural committee. Specifically, the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association, Centene, and Molina – all of which offer Medicare Advantage, Medicaid managed care, and ACA health plans – [donated](#) between \$10,000 and \$50,000 to the Trump-Vance inaugural committee.
 - After proposing to keep federal payments to private Medicare Advantage plans flat in 2027, the Trump administration caved by finalizing a \$13 billion annual [pay raise](#) to Medicare Advantage insurers and abandoning other proposed reforms, causing insurers' stocks to surge.

- Trump is also reportedly considering a policy to [automatically enroll](#) older Americans in private Medicare Advantage plans, which cost taxpayers 14% more [per patient](#) – or \$76 billion annually – than traditional Medicare plans.
 - Trump and Congressional Republicans passed the biggest Medicaid cut in history which will result in 10 million people becoming [uninsured](#) and make health care providers that serve low-income populations particularly [vulnerable](#) to private equity takeovers.
 - Once they take the helm of a health care company, private equity firms raise prices and lower the quality of care, resulting in [increased](#) mortality, and eventually close hospitals after investors cash out.
 - The Trump administration has let private equity health care deals proceed with [little scrutiny](#) while companies like [Blackstone](#), led by longstanding Trump donor Steve Schwarzman, turn huge profits. For example, the Justice Department [settled](#) its lawsuit to block UnitedHealth Group's \$3.3 billion acquisition of rival home health care provider Amedisys, allowing the anticompetitive merger to proceed, amid a [lobbying blitz](#) by the insurance conglomerate.
 - After announcing a non-binding [pledge](#) from private insurers to streamline prior authorization requirements, the Trump administration reversed course and [enlisted](#) AI companies [affiliated](#) with insurers to [expand prior authorization](#) in Medicare – which will likely lead to AI tools, designed to maximize profit, making decisions that can delay and deny necessary medical procedures for Medicare patients.
 - These developments raise several concerns, including whether Mehmet Oz, the Administrator for the Center on Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), divested his UnitedHealth Group stock as he [pledged](#) during his confirmation process; if [industry lobbying](#) played a role in the administration's prior authorization decisions, and why CMS refuses to disclose if and how it manages potential conflicts of interest in the [vendor selection process](#).

2. Tariffs: Trump's erratic tariff policies served as a vehicle for corporate corruption and grift, paid for by workers and families.

- Trump and his administration used tariffs as leverage to secure business deals that enriched him and his family:
 - For instance, on Liberation Day 2025, Trump imposed a 46% tariff on Vietnam, one of the highest rates for any country, which the administration said reflected the large trade deficit with Vietnam. But just three months later in July, Trump reached an [agreement](#) to lower the tariffs to 20%. Early in the negotiations, the Vietnamese government [agreed](#) to fast-track the permits for the construction of a highly lucrative \$1.5 billion golf resort being developed by the Trump Organization. An approval process that would normally take years took only three months and [ignored](#) several required steps.

- Trump gave favorable deals to corporate executives and foreign leaders who lavished him with gifts:
 - In August 2025, Apple CEO Tim Cook – who had [donated](#) 1 million dollars to Trump’s inauguration – gave him a glass disc with a [24-karat gold stand](#) to commemorate a pledge to invest more in American manufacturing. Trump then announced that Apple would be exempt from semiconductor tariffs. During that event, Trump implied that companies who make large investments could also buy their way out of tariffs.
 - Later, Trump [lowered](#) Switzerland’s tariffs from 39% to 15% just a few days after Swiss business leaders presented him with a personalized gold bar worth more than \$130,000 and a Rolex desk clock. One administration official [told](#) Axios, "It was tough to beat Apple, but the Swiss did it."
 - Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick offered to [cut tariffs on steel](#) if European officials would roll back online privacy and anti-monopoly rules, offering to trade away U.S. manufacturing to help Big Tech allies.
 - ArcelorMittal, a Luxembourg-based steel giant and the world's second-largest steelmaker, [reportedly donated](#) \$37 million worth of foreign steel for the White House ballroom project. Just two days after Trump announced he'd been offered free steel, he allowed Lutnick to [cut tariffs](#) for companies with steel operations in Canada or Mexico that supply U.S. automakers – including ArcelorMittal.

- Trump used tariffs to help his political allies and punish his enemies:

- Last July, Trump [imposed](#) a 50% tariff on Brazil, a country with which the U.S. has a trade surplus, just as Trump ally and former President Jair Bolsonaro was about to be arrested for an attempted coup.
 - The White House [cited](#) what it characterized as the political persecution of Bolsonaro, waged by the current Brazilian Supreme Court, in the official reasoning to impose additional tariffs on Brazil.
 - Americans paid the price for Trump's international allies breaking the law, as coffee imported from Brazil [surged](#) to a 40% increase in price.
- In another move to protect his political allies, Trump [quadrupled](#) Argentina beef import quotas, angering his own base of U.S. farmers and ranchers, and gave the country a [\\$20 billion financial bailout](#) just days before the country's elections in which Argentinian politician Javier Milei, Trump's top pick for president, was up for re-election.

3. Gas Prices: Trump's war in Iran and is driving up gas prices for American families, while Trump's allies profit.

- As Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth [urged](#) Trump to attack Iran, Hegseth's broker at Morgan Stanley reportedly [sought](#) to make a multimillion-dollar investment in major defense companies.
- On the campaign trail, Trump met with oil companies and [asked](#) for a \$1 billion dollar donation, promising it would be a deal for the companies. On his inauguration, Chevron [donated](#) \$2 million, while Occidental Petroleum, Exxon Mobil and ConocoPhillips [donated](#) \$1 million each. And now, the world's largest oil and gas companies have made [\\$23 billion](#) in excess profits during the first [month](#) of the war in Iran, as crude oil surged to over \$100 per barrel.
 - Meanwhile, American families are left to contend with the financial fallout from the war. In April, gas surpassed \$4.18 per gallon – the [highest](#) price in nearly four years – due to the conflict. The average household is [expected](#) to spend \$857 more on gasoline this year.
 - Beyond what consumers are paying at the pump, rising gas prices will mean more [expensive](#) summer travel. Airlines, for example, have admitted to using rising fuel costs as a cover to [raise](#) airfare prices.

4. Energy: Trump has supported data centers and natural gas exports, driving up electricity prices, while he and his friends make a profit.

- Data centers have played a [major role](#) in increasing electricity prices. In 2025, residential prices increased by 7.1% – more than twice the pace of inflation – and exceeded 20% in some states.
- Dubai-based luxury real estate firm DAMAC Properties has [partnered](#) with Trump in two golf courses in Dubai that paid Trump at least \$13 million, and possibly up to \$19 million in licensing and management fees, according to financial disclosure documents. The company [plans](#) to spend \$20 billion to develop data centers in the U.S. and Trump has suggested he could secure expedited reviews for the projects.
- Trump has also made sure to protect the data centers driving up electricity prices with carve-outs when [imposing](#) tariffs on chips.
- Meanwhile, Lutnick's sons' company Cantor Fitzgerald (which [passed](#) from Lutnick to his heirs shortly after Trump's inauguration) has completed more than \$25 billion in data center deals. Lutnick's sons will take a large cut in fees on each of these transactions.
 - The Trump administration also backed a \$1.6 billion funding package to help build a Texas mine and magnet facility for defense and high-tech industries. Cantor Fitzgerald was designated to raise the money to fund the [investment](#).
- Another factor in rising electricity bills is the [increased](#) export of liquefied natural gas (LNG), as there is less supply left for domestic use. Trump has said he wants to double natural gas exports. The reason? These exports are highly profitable for gas executives – big contributors to Trump's campaign.
 - Venture Global [donated](#) \$1 million to Trump's inauguration, and later, one of its projects was granted an export license from the Department of Energy. The CEO of Energy Transfer LP, Kelcy Warren, [donated](#) \$25 million to the main super PAC supporting Trump and also personally contributed \$5 million to his campaign. Energy Transfer later received a three-year extension for an LNG project. Following the extension, Warren's [wealth](#) rose by nearly 10%.

5. Air Travel: Trump's transportation secretary – a former airline lobbyist – canceled passenger protections and waived millions in fines against airlines.

- The Trump administration [canceled](#) plans to compensate U.S. passengers \$200 to \$775 for significant flight delays or cancellations. It also [waived](#) \$11 million in fines against Southwest Airlines over mishandling nearly 17,000 flight cancellations around Christmas 2022.
 - Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy is a former airline industry lobbyist who has kept close ties to the sector.
 - Duffy [embarked](#) on a road trip reality show for America's 250th birthday. The trip was [paid for](#) by industries and companies that his department regulates, including Toyota, United Airlines and Boeing.
 - Duffy's son-in-law, Alfonso, is running for a congressional seat with Trump's endorsement. Duffy has actively campaigned for his-son-in-law, [hosting fundraising dinners](#) with transportation industry lobbyists, while [enacting](#) policies that support the industry in his role as Secretary of Transportation.

6. Tax Filing: Trump killed Direct File – an easy and free way for Americans to pay taxes – after TurboTax's parent company donated \$1 million to his inauguration fund.

- In 2025, Trump canceled Direct File, a program that would have allowed millions of taxpayers to file directly with the IRS for free, if fully implemented. The average American spends [approximately](#) \$160 per year on commercial tax prep services – a cost that could have been eliminated with Direct File. Intuit, the parent company of TurboTax, made a \$1 million [contribution](#) to Trump's inauguration committee, shortly before Trump's Treasury Department [abolished](#) Direct File.
- When the Trump administration shut down IRS Direct File, it pledged to modernize the IRS's [decades-old](#) Free File program, which operates through partnerships with eight for-profit tax software companies, including Intuit and H&R Block. That modernization has not occurred, leaving taxpayers stuck with an outdated, complicated system where users still end up spending as much as \$190 to file, while the participating companies continue to profit.

7. Corporate Misbehavior: The Trump administration has let corporations and individuals off the hook even after their actions harmed Americans – sometimes not long after defendants made million-dollar donations.

- More than 170 enforcement actions [against](#) corporations were canceled or frozen, while multiple agencies responsible for oversight and investigation of those cases are being [dismantled](#).

- Under Trump, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) has [permanently](#) dismissed 22 of its public enforcement actions as of October 2025, costing consumers millions in foregone relief. The CFPB's dismantling has also benefited major donors including Elon Musk, whose companies [faced scrutiny](#) for allegedly violating consumer protection laws.
 - The CFPB [dismissed](#) a lawsuit against Capital One for misleading clients about its savings accounts, leading consumers to miss out on more than \$2 billion in interest payments. Capital One had [donated](#) \$1 million to Trump's inauguration committee.
 - Toyota Motor Credit was caught running an illegal scheme that overcharged borrowers for add-ons to their car loans, made them difficult to cancel, and falsely reported information that hurt consumers' credit to credit bureaus. The company was [ordered](#) to pay \$48 million to affected consumers, and \$12 million into a victim relief fund. After Toyota [donated](#) \$1 million to Trump's inauguration fund, the order was terminated.
- The Department of Justice [shut down](#) more than 900 federal fraud cases in Trump's first six months, including one against a mortgage lender accused of defrauding the Federal Housing Administration, and closed more than 100 healthcare fraud cases ostensibly to make better "prioritization of resources."
- Trump has also politicized the power to pardon, using it to wipe clean dozens of corporate crimes and millions in fines perpetrators would have owed. His [pardons](#) in cases involving public programs, government contracts, tax fraud, and Medicare and Medicaid fraud have caused Americans to lose out on \$2 billion in repayment and taxpayer recovery. Many of Trump's pardons have been issued to people connected to his own family – or to those who have hired [million-dollar](#) lobbyists.
 - Paul Walczak, a nursing home executive convicted of tax evasion, received a full pardon for his conviction three weeks after his mother [donated](#) \$1 million to Trump at a Mar-a-Lago fundraiser. He now no longer has to pay more than \$4 million in restitution.
 - Trump also commuted the sentence of Lawrence Duran after he was sentenced to 50 years for [one of the largest](#) Medicare fraud schemes in history, canceling any remaining portion of the \$87 million [repayment](#) he may still owe as part of his conviction.

8. Credit Bureaus and Loan Rates: While Trump took an axe to consumer protection watchdogs, families have been left at the mercy of abusive credit bureaus and extractive interest rates.

- Under Trump, the CFPB [abandoned](#) a rule removing medical debt from credit reports that would have helped 15 million Americans raise their credit scores, thereby enabling them to secure better credit terms and lower interest rates.
 - Research finds that just a 20-point increase in credit score – the estimated increase under the CFPB’s now-abandoned rule – can [save](#) consumers at least \$20,000 in interest payments over the life of a 30-year home loan.
 - Credit reporting companies [spent](#) more than \$1 million lobbying in 2025 including in [opposition](#) to the rule.
- Since Trump’s inauguration, more than 2.7 million credit reporting [complaints](#) submitted to the CFPB have gone unanswered, leaving millions at risk of being denied loans and subjected to higher rates from lenders.
 - Under the Trump administration, the chance that credit bureaus will make [egregious mistakes](#) is on the rise, while the chance that consumers can get those errors fixed by agency watchdogs plummet.
 - One woman in Colorado saw her credit score tank by more than 80 points after a creditor claimed she owed nearly \$250,000 in a student loan she [never took out](#).
 - In 2024, credit reporting company Experian [resolved](#) nearly 20% of complaints in consumers’ favor in 2024. During the Trump administration, this rate fell to less than 1%. One of the lawyers leading the pullback on enforcement [represented](#) Experian for years before joining the CFPB during the Trump administration.

9. Digital Assets and Prediction Markets: The Trump family has personally netted at least \$1.4 billion from crypto schemes, as this administration pulls away from oversight and enforcement of crypto fraud and prediction market regulations.

- Trump has installed people with crypto conflicts of interest throughout his administration, including by [nominating](#) more than 200 appointees who owned crypto assets worth up to \$340 million.

- Simultaneously, the Department of Justice [shut down](#) investigations into crypto companies. Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche, while serving as deputy and holding at least \$485,000 in crypto assets, eliminated the National Cryptocurrency Enforcement Team.
- Additionally, the administration has accelerated the adoption of crypto into critical federal agencies, including when Trump's Federal Housing Finance Agency Director Bill Pulte urged mortgage giant Fannie Mae to accept [crypto-backed mortgages](#) for the first time ever.
- Trump's crypto company World Liberty Financial (WLF) [relies](#) on Binance, a crypto exchange that admitted to anti-money laundering failures, Iran sanctions violations, and failing to report suspicious transactions linked to terrorist groups like Hamas. Binance has [reportedly](#) donated software to help launch WLF, and its founder, Changpeng Zhao, who had been convicted for failure to maintain an effective anti-laundering program, was later [pardoned](#) by Trump.
- Over the past year, Donald Trump Jr. has served as a [strategic advisor](#) to Kalshi and a [large investor](#) in Polymarket, while the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) – the agency overseeing these firms – has acted as their ally, rather than their watchdog. Both firms had [actively lobbied](#) Trump's CFTC to [block](#) states from regulating prediction markets in the same way they regulate gambling companies.
- A recent *New York Times* [investigation](#) found that CFTC leadership under the Trump administration placed career officials on administrative leave or forced them out after they raised concerns about prediction market and crypto company ties to the Trump family, while dropping or dramatically reducing penalties in multiple enforcement actions.
 - In short, these firms and their boosters are profiting from deregulation at the expense of ordinary Americans, who can fall victim to gambling addiction, financial ruin, and corrupt outcomes.