

# NEW YORK Magazine

## GOP Crusade Against ‘Fraud’ Just Means Big Safety-Net Cuts

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Last year’s One Big Beautiful Bill Act paid for its tax cuts and its vast increases in mass deportation and defense funding in two principal ways: a total reversal of incentives for clean energy and major cuts in Medicaid and SNAP spending. This was advertised as an assault on “waste, fraud, and abuse,” a hardy perennial of racially coded right-wing rhetoric dating back to the 1960s.

Now in 2026, as congressional Republicans eye a new fast-track budget package in order to pay for Trump’s Iran war and some more midterm-election-motivated tax-cut goodies, they are going back to the same well: safety-net cuts poorly but loudly rationalized as “fraud prevention” measures. As Politico reports:

“Fraud prevention” in federal and state safety-net programs should be the main target of a new Republican reconciliation bill, House Budget Chair Jodey

Arrington said in an interview Tuesday where he also called for reviving Medicaid spending cuts provisions that fell out of last year's GOP megabill.

“The whole kit and caboodle of welfare is \$1.6 trillion in our budget,” Arrington said on the sidelines of the House Republican policy retreat. “But it's also not just welfare — it's programs across the federal government that states need to be responsible [for].”

The bait and switch here is pretty obvious: Arrington is calling for “fraud prevention” in selected programs but really thinks the entire federal safety net ought to be turned over to the states, a conservative policy impulse that dates back at least to the beginnings of the Reagan administration. In any event, a new GOP crusade against ill-defined “fraud” has been triggered by MAGA hyperventilation over a genuine if grossly exaggerated fraud scandal in Minnesota that notably involved nonprofits run by Somali immigrants. Before you could say “criminal aliens ripping off taxpayers,” the Minnesota incident was used to justify the deadly ICE surge in Minneapolis, and then to launch a J.D. Vance-led “war on fraud” announced during Trump's recent State of the Union Address.

Vance immediately imposed a freeze on Medicaid payments in Minnesota, and the administration has subsequently threatened similar actions in other blue states on the specious grounds that Radical Left Democrats are heavily engaged in the immigrant-crime business. But as Arrington's lust for Medicaid dollars shows, it's all just part of a long-term fight to redistribute federal spending from health care and social services to defense, mass deportation, and tax cuts.

As it happens, Arrington probably won't get his way. A second big reconciliation bill remains a very long shot, in part because it's a midterm election year in which loud-and-proud safety-net cuts could be a death sentence for Republican candidates in marginal districts, and in part because the GOP doesn't have the margins of control in either branch of Congress to pull it off against determined Democratic opposition. It's always possible Republicans could revisit the issue next year, but only if they manage to hang onto their governing trifecta, which won't happen if they cannot learn to *shut up* about cutting Medicaid. It's the sort of perpetually unpopular measure that is only on the table in odd years, when voters can be heard only in the distance.