

A banner week for inequality and its promoters

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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On Tuesday, we learned that the economy's modest improvements last year [didn't help the poverty rate any](#) or prevent income inequality from being [as bad as ever](#). Thursday the House zeroed in on these social ills and did its damndest to make them worse, [passing massive cuts to the food stamps program](#) that does so much to keep Americans above the poverty line.

Then this morning House Republicans moved forward on their "[Defund Obamacare or the whole government gets it!](#)" plan. Quite a week.

It's tempting to write that last one off as just a reflection of how ridiculous our political system has become: Obamacare isn't going away, and everyone in Congress knows it. But GOP House members have to answer to hardline activists in their own party far more than they do to moderate or liberal constituents—gerrymandering (a bipartisan pastime) made sure of that—so they have to fight the president's signature achievement to the end. That's where their political incentives are, even if their own leadership would rather just govern. The problem is mostly about what the whole system has become.

And that's certainly a big part of the story—one we liberals ought to keep in mind if and when the tables are turned. But this endless resistance to the health-care law isn't just about the political imperative to be against things. It's about attacking the social safety net on principle—a principle that's on full, perverse display this week.

[E.J. Dionne puts it well:](#)

It's also important to understand why the Republican right is so fixated on killing or delaying Obamacare before it goes into effect. *Its central worry is not that the program will fail but that it will succeed.*

In an interview [on Fox News this summer](#), [Sen. Ted Cruz](#) (R-Tex.) a leader of the stop-Obamacare forces, gave the game away. After ritualistically declaring that "Obamacare isn't working," he said this: "If we're going to repeal it, we've got to do so now or it will remain with us forever." Why? Because once the

administration gets the health insurance “exchanges in place . . . the subsidies in place,” people will get “hooked on Obamacare so that it can never be unwound.”

In other words, Obamacare, like Medicare and Social Security, could work well enough and improve the lives of enough people that voters will get “hooked” on it.

I think that's right. Obamacare is based on ideas that came from Republicans, and there's little doubt that Republicans like Mitt Romney, John McCain and even John Boehner see the program as something milder than the end of freedom as we know it. But those aren't the Republicans who are throwing bombs around Capitol Hill right now.

The bomb throwers aren't just anti-Obama; they're anti-social spending—whether or not a given example of it effectively improves Americans' lives, as food stamps do and Obamacare is poised to. If the latter succeeds, it will soon be as popular as Medicare. They aren't afraid health-care reform won't work; they're afraid it will.

And that just doesn't count as governing. The congressional tea partiers seem to be running the place, and they're doing a pretty shameful job of it.