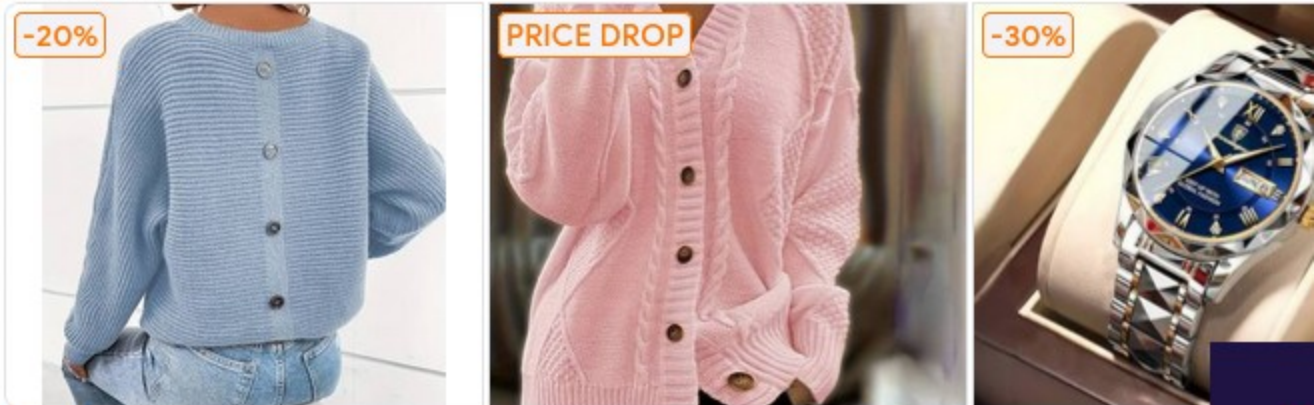




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Labour scrapping the winter fuel payment for ten million British pensioners is worse than ditching the state pension triple lock, former Tory minister warns

By RYAN HOOPER

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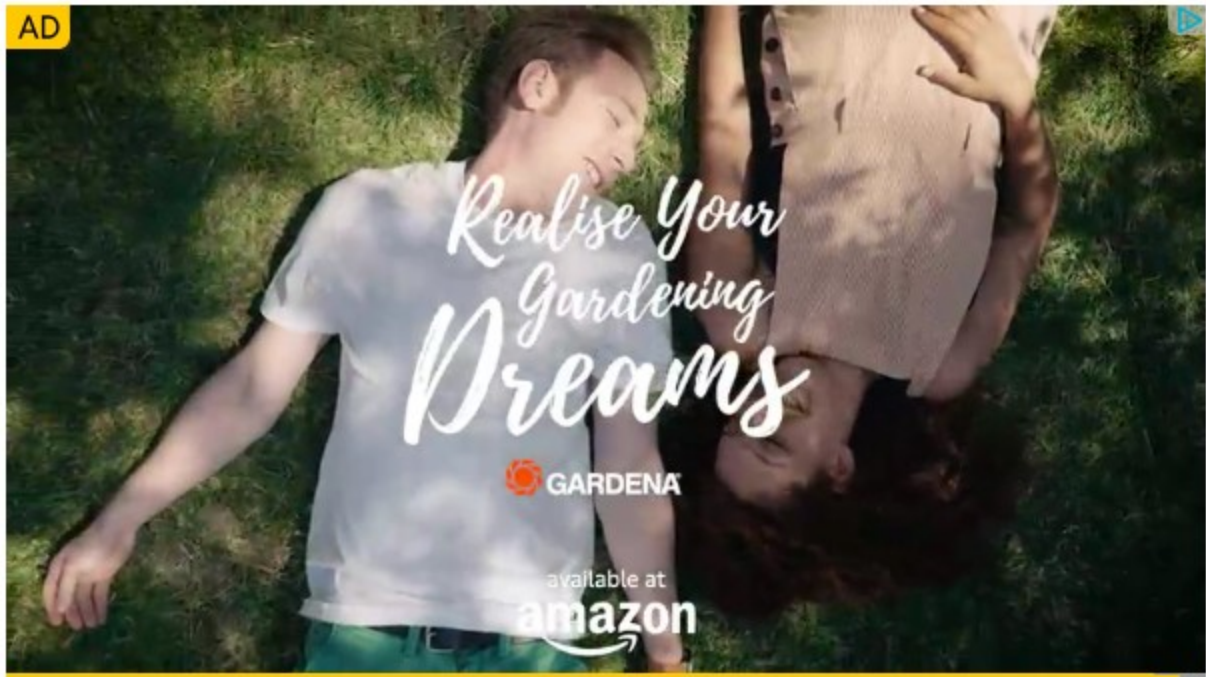
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Scrapping the winter fuel payment is worse than ditching the state pension triple lock, a former minister has warned.

Baroness Ros Altmann, who was **Tory** pensions minister from 2015 to 2016, said cash-strapped older people will be hit harder in the pocket as a result of the Government's decision.

Labour scrapping the winter fuel payment for ten million British pensioners is worse than ditching the state pension triple lock, former Tory minister warns | Daily Mail Online
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Chancellor **Rachel Reeves** this week announced that payment - worth up to £300 a year - will begin to be means-tested.



It means 10 million pensioners will be stripped of the benefit, with people on incomes as low as £1,000 a month affected from this winter.

A petition by Age UK calling for the winter fuel payment to be reinstated has attracted 100,000 signatures. Around 25,000 people have signed another petition calling on the Government to abandon the 'callous' plan.



Labour scrapping the winter fuel payment for ten million British pensioners is worse than ditching the state pension triple lock, former Tory minister warns | Daily Mail Online
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Baroness Altmann said the decision 'makes a mockery' of Labour's recent pledge to honour the triple lock.

She told the i newspaper: 'Older citizens are already losing the extra cost of living payments they received last winter.'

'Now, taking away the £200 or £300 many were expecting to receive this November, in just a few weeks' time, comes as a big hit for those just above the means-testing threshold.'

'Three hundred pounds a year may seem insignificant to most policymakers, but to pensioners it can be important. I do hope this sudden decision can still be reversed for this year at least.'

Caroline Abrahams, charity director for Age UK, said: 'The fact that so many people have taken the trouble to sign our petition within 48 hours and during the hottest week of the year shows the strength of feeling.'

'What worries us the most is that we fear

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many will not be able to afford to stay adequately warm this winter as a result, potentially causing them enormous anxiety and distress, as well as undermining their physical health, especially if they are living with serious health conditions.'

Winter fuel payments are currently automatically made to pensioner households, with those aged over 80 getting £300 and younger pensioners receiving a £200 payment. This winter, these fuel payments will only be paid to those on pension credit.

It means those with annual incomes of more than £11,344 will lose out.



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The new Labour government was days old when it confirmed it would protect the triple lock, which sees state pensions increase each year in line with either inflation, average earnings, or by 2.5 per cent, whichever is higher.

Baroness Altmann added: 'Although the Government says it will be protecting the triple lock, actually this move on its own is worse than just taking away the minimum 2.5 per cent guarantee of the triple lock, because it amounts to a 3 per cent cut in the basic state pension for the over 80s, and a 2.5 per cent cut for those who are on the new state pension.'

'This is not, in my view, a decision that should have been taken.'

Former Unison official Dennis Reed warned Labour would be 'haunted' by the controversial decision unless they revoked it.

Mr Reed, from campaign group Silver Voices, said he felt older people were being 'targeted' by the Government.

He told the Mail: 'Mark my words, there will be lives lost over this - excess deaths from hypothermia, people unable to put the heating on, we know people will be switching the hot water on once a week to have a shower and that's it, they won't be able to afford to do any more.'

'I had a man contact me after the Chancellor's announcement, and he said he spent the last two winters under blankets, and it looks like it will be the same this year.'

'People will be going to libraries just to keep warm, but there are many who are housebound for whom that is not an option - this policy will particularly hurt them, their bodies just won't be able to take it. Let's just hope it will be a mild winter.'

'We are a cross-party organisation, but this feels like a very unLabour-like policy. It is not what anybody would expect from a Labour government, which is supposed to be looking after people who are vulnerable and cannot defend themselves.'

'The Government needs to have a re-think. If not, this decision will haunt Labour for the next five years. People do not forget these things.'

Labour defended the decision, saying that growth and its new GB Energy company will 'bring people's bills down'.

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