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Reeves will regret her winter fuel payment raid on pensioners, says JEFF PRESTRIDGE

By JEFF PRESTRIDGE FOR THE MAIL ON SUNDAY ✕

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Rachel Reeves' tenure as Chancellor of the Exchequer has got off to a shaky start. Wobbly as Hartley's Jelly.

Her update on the country's fragile public finances, given to the House of Commons six days ago, was loaded with financial poison as she announced a wicked curtailment of the **winter fuel payment** which will result in ten million pensioners no longer receiving the benefit, worth up to £300.

As a result, those people who have reached state pension age in England and Wales will now only receive the payment this winter if they receive **pension credit** – or a small number of other means-tested benefits (the devolved governments of Scotland and Northern Ireland make their own rules).



Cancelled: Chancellor Rachel Reeves has scrapped the universal winter fuel payments for pensioners

The announcement means that up to 1.2million financially-challenged pensioners who are eligible for pension credit but who do not claim it (either through pride, unawareness or an inability to go through the application process) will miss out.

As will many who just fail to qualify for the benefit, but whose finances are mightily stretched. My mailbox has been overwhelmed by readers spitting blood over Reeves' move.

They feel that pensioners, who have no representation in government, have been unfairly picked on.

I spent five hours on the phone to readers who will lose the benefit. For some, its loss will put more pressure on already fragile finances. For others, it will make little difference, but they feel betrayed after Labour had vehemently denied, pre-election, that the payment would be means-tested.

In the first of these two camps sits Julia Holmes, a 69-year-old retired carer from Saltash in Cornwall. Julia, who is divorced, has already had to adjust financially to the fact that her state pension, promised at age 60, was not paid until 66 because of the equalisation of state pension age for men and women. Now, she will lose her fuel payment.

'You work hard for 40 years in a sector which does not pay well,' says Julia. 'You put a little aside for a rainy day, struggle to get by and then this woman walks into Number 11 Downing Street and, without an ounce of sympathy, decides to make pensioners like me worse off.'

She adds: 'Politicians are so out of touch. Rachel Reeves should come to Cornwall to see with her own eyes the hardship that many pensioners face – some relying on food banks to help them get by.'

John Lloyd, from Letchworth in Hertfordshire, sits in the other camp. John, 84, has been married to Anita for 62 years.

Founder of a successful double-glazing company (Kindlelight Windows), his retirement is underpinned by income from several pensions set up during his working life.

'We won't miss the payment,' he says.

'We live in a four-bedroom house and if things go to hell in a handcart under this Labour government, we can always downsize.'

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'But it's the duplicity of it all. On the one hand, Labour is happy to take from pensioners, claiming the country's finances are in a mess. But on the other, it's quite happy to pay huge sums of money to public sector employees to keep in favour with the unions.'

His view is shared by many. Maggi Warner, 75, a retired personal assistant from Yate in South Gloucestershire, describes the 'raid' on pensioners as 'despicable'.

Married to Barry, 78, who worked in travel, Maggi says the removal of the benefit is a 'cheap shot'. 'Us pensioners need to have our voice heard inside government,' she adds.

Maggi is quite right. Pensioners should be represented inside government (Baroness Ros Altmann would be a brilliant voice).

Twenty-two organisations have written to Reeves calling on her to halt the clampdown on the winter fuel payment.

Charity Independent Age has co-ordinated the letter and is urging pensioners to email their MP and express their anger at the move. It is also urging them to check whether they qualify for pension credit by visiting [gov.uk/pension-credit/how-to-claim](https://www.gov.uk/pension-credit/how-to-claim).

I fear Reeves is not for turning.