

Examining the \$20 Burrito Controversy: Is It Really About 'Affordability,' or Is It About Isolationism, Marxism, and Class War?



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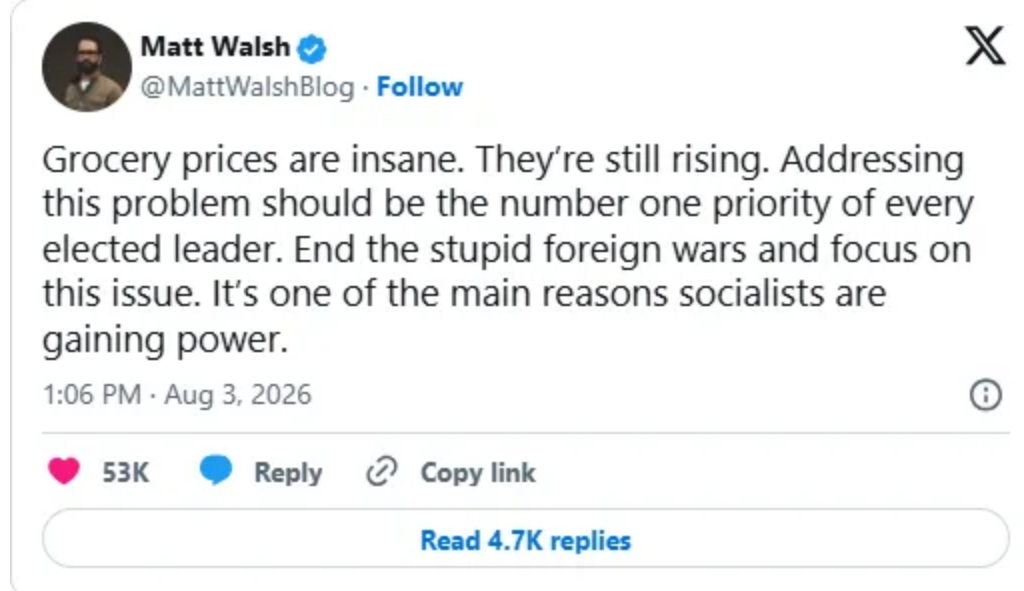
The “\$20 burrito” controversy is not about “affordability”. Instead, it is a political vehicle for justifying isolationism, dressed up in the language of kitchen-table economics. Many who have seized on this discussion do not believe America should ever be engaged in any war, for any reason.

They often pair the burrito complaint with the “endless war” talking point, treating military action or even the capacity for it as a root of domestic hardship. Those promoting this narrative label anyone who questions it as a “neocon.” The connection is false, the history is inverted, and the underlying framework is a recycled Marxist attack on American power. It is a good thing these restrainers were not around during America’s Revolutionary War or World War II. Their logic would have left the colonies under British rule and Europe under fascist domination.

How the \$20 Burrito Debate Exploded on X

The discussion erupted on August 3rd when Matt Walsh [posted](#) that grocery prices remained insane and still rising, arguing that addressing this should be the top priority, stating unironically that the high prices – caused by big government spending that socialists love – is “one of the main reasons socialists are winning”. Walsh also called to end “stupid foreign wars” which most took to mean President Trump’s military actions in Iran.

On August 4, Turning Point USA spokesman Andrew Kolvet [shared](#) a college student’s take: “A burrito shouldn’t cost \$20.” Kolvet noted that much of it was a hangover from Covid and Biden-era inflation, but basic things still felt too expensive.



Joel Berry of the Babylon Bee [pointed out](#) that his wife made homemade burritos for a family of eight for under \$20 total and suggested the crisis was partly an “I don’t know how to cook” problem. Marc Thiessen [dismissed](#) the complaint by saying college cafeteria burritos come with the meal plan. Vice President JD Vance childishly [replied](#) that Thiessen had clearly never missed a burrito. Ben Shapiro [criticized](#) the framing of \$20 burritos as a near-human right while rejecting practical steps to lower costs and noting the reluctance over military engagement. Dan Crenshaw [told complainers](#) to stop whining, get a job, and eat ramen like previous generations did in college.



Critics of the framing were branded “neocons.” Sean Davis of The Federalist [described](#) the opposing view as “current neocon war inflation messaging” that treated fast food burritos as only for the “independently wealthy.” An [UnHerd](#) piece framed the debate as one in which “neocons are losing.” The Daily Caller (founded by Woke Right icon Tucker Carlson) [condemned](#) “establishment free-market and neoconservative D.C. think tankers” for being out of touch with the plight of young Americans dealing with the higher cost of living.

The Real Drivers of Higher Prices

Prices have risen. That is not in dispute. The causes are not mysterious. Decades of expansive federal outlays – under Obama, through the COVID emergency spending spree, and especially under Biden – flooded the economy with demand while supply chains and energy policy were deliberately constrained.

The so-called [Inflation Reduction Act](#) stands as a prime example: a Green New Deal repackaged with a marketing label, loaded with industrial subsidies and “green” mandates that raised costs rather than lowered them. These policy choices, not distant military operations, are the primary drivers.

The Marxist Roots of the “Endless War” Narrative

The “endless war” refrain that accompanies burrito outrage is not a fresh insight. It is an old hard-left line against defense spending. Edward L. Sard, a mid-20th-century [Trotskyist](#) economist, [formalized](#) the “Permanent War Economy” theory. In his telling, capitalism supposedly requires continuous large-scale government weapons purchases to absorb surplus production, keep factories running, and prevent mass unemployment. Defense budgets become permanent make-work. This is [economic fiction](#), but has been used by left for decades as a cudgel against military spending. Real markets clear through prices, private investment, and innovation. High military spending is a political and security decision, not an inherent requirement of the free market system.

Sard’s framework served a political purpose: weaken the state’s military capacity so revolutionary forces face less resistance.

That same logic was later weaponized as “guns versus butter.” During Vietnam, the [socialist](#) Martin Luther King Jr.’s 1967 “Beyond Vietnam” [speech](#) described the war as a “demonic, destructive suction tube” draining resources from anti-poverty programs and warned that a nation prioritizing military defense over social uplift was “approaching spiritual death.” Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, in her [1969 House floor speech](#), pledged to vote against every defense appropriation until priorities shifted from “profits and war” to “people and peace.”

New Left organizations, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and radical publications hammered the identical claim: Vietnam spending starved housing, education, and welfare. In practice, the demand was never to return the money to taxpayers. It was to redirect it into social programs while the same activists worked to undercut the American war effort, empower communist forces, and treat returning soldiers with open contempt. Today’s restrainers echo this same refusal to accept any American engagement abroad.

See a flyer calling students to join a March on Washington:

[SDS March on Washington to End Vietnam War](#)

“America is committing pointless murder,” the flyer declares. “We are outraged that two million dollars a day is expended for a war on the poor in Vietnam, while government financing is so desperately needed to abolish poverty at home,” the flyer continues, foreshadowing hard left and woke right arguments for decades to come.

Class War Dressed Up as Food Prices

The \$20 burrito chorus repeats the pattern. It demands that military strength be sacrificed so that government can expand domestic redistribution. Simultaneously, some of the same voices blame older Americans – those who worked, saved, and lived through earlier economic cycles – for today’s prices. This is classic class-war framing: pit generational and income groups against one another while ignoring the actual fiscal record of massive, sustained government outlays. It is the Occupy-era “eat the rich” / “1%” rhetoric applied to food prices and foreign policy.

The pattern is consistent. Criticize any capacity for American military action, attribute every domestic hardship to that capacity, invoke the permanent-war-economy mythology, and reframe the debate as a moral choice between bombs and butter – or between soldiers and social spending. Anyone who pushes back is often falsely labeled a “neocon.”

The goal is not cheaper burritos. It is to advance isolationism that rejects engagement under any circumstances and to promote a zero-sum politics of resentment.

The Real Affordability Argument

When legitimate frustrations over everyday living costs are automatically funneled into a narrative that casts military spending as the root cause of domestic hardship, everyday economic strain is co-opted to serve a pre-existing anti-defense agenda – lending populist momentum to a critique with deep historical roots in the anti-capitalist left.

Inflation is real. So is the need for fiscal restraint. Neither is solved by treating defense policy as the primary culprit or by recycling mid-century Marxist theories about capitalism’s supposed need for permanent war. The \$20 burrito debate, which ballooned into a days-long food fight is a vehicle. The destination is the same old attack on American strength and the same old call for class conflict.



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