

Survey shows continuing hunger across US as Congress prepares to cut food stamps

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25 August 2012

A Gallup poll released this past week shows that tens of millions of American families continue to face the threat of hunger. The “food hardship” statistics are based on surveys conducted with more than 177,000 US adults during the first six months of 2012, as part of the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index.

In 15 of the 50 states, at least 20 percent of the population reported that they did not have enough money for the food they or their families needed on at least one occasion in the previous 12 months. The nationwide figure was 18.2 percent, about the same number as the 18.6 percent reported in 2011. While the threshold was at least once in a 12-month period, for the vast majority of those affected there is no doubt that “food hardship” was a far more common if not frequent problem.

The highest figure was for the state of Mississippi, which usually comes at the bottom of most indices of social health and conditions, and where 24.9 percent of residents reported the threat of hunger. Among the other states most affected were Alabama, Delaware, Georgia and Nevada. The problem of hunger was most commonly reported in the states of the Southeast and Southwest.

Of course this crisis is closely correlated with poverty. The Census Bureau’s American Communities Survey is scheduled to report national poverty rates in the month of September. According to the nonprofit advocacy group Heartland Alliance for Human Needs and Human Rights, the figures will reveal “poverty rates at levels unseen in nearly a century.” This comes more than three years into the so-called “recovery” from the housing crisis and financial collapse that began five years ago.

The millions facing permanent joblessness, underemployment or jobs paying a fraction of previous

employment are facing an additional double whammy in the coming months. The worst drought since the 1950s has affected nearly 80 percent of US agricultural land, according to the Gallup Wellbeing web site, and this is expected to lead to significant price increases for basic necessities in the near future. The US Department of Agriculture forecasts increases within two months for beef, pork, poultry and dairy. Price hikes for processed foods and packaged goods will take somewhat longer to have full effect.

At the same time, Congress is considering two separate bills that would cut food stamp aid under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The House version of the omnibus agriculture appropriations bill would cut \$16 billion in SNAP funding, which would eliminate food stamp assistance for at least 1.8 million people, according to the *truthout* web site.

The Obama administration opposes the House cuts, but in the Senate, controlled by the Democrats, another version of this appropriations bill would also cut food stamps, though “only” by \$4.4 billion. The Congressional Budget Office reports that spending on the SNAP program has soared from \$30 billion in 2007 to \$73 billion in 2011.

The issues of poverty and hunger are virtually missing from the fraudulent and reactionary presidential campaigns of Obama and Romney. With barely two months to go before the elections, the Democrats are utilizing their typical tactic of pointing to the vicious proposals from their Republican rivals and telling working people that they have no choice but to endorse the Democratic representatives of the corporate and financial establishment as the “lesser evil.”



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