

Trump budget proposes massive cuts in food stamps and other social programs

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17 February 2018

On Monday, the Trump administration turned over its \$4.4 trillion 2019 budget to the Senate for approval. The budget proposes significant increases in defense spending and border policing. At the same time, it promises to cut or eliminate the programs that low-income Americans depend on to help them feed, house, and educate themselves or their families.

Under Trump's budget, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), commonly referred to as food stamps, would be cut by more than \$213 billion over ten years, nearly 30 percent. The budget also proposes radically altering the administration of the program, with cuts that would result in loss of benefits for at least 4 million people, including the unemployed, the disabled, the elderly, and low-income families with children.

The budget would shift more than \$260 billion in food purchasing from individual households to the government. The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) would withhold between \$24 and \$29 billion per year in SNAP benefits—about 40 percent of the benefits issued to struggling families—and use half of those funds to supply boxes of non-perishable food items, such as shelf-stable milk, dry cereal, pasta, peanut butter, beans, and canned foods to families using the program.

Unlike the commodities programs familiar to impoverished families in bygone years, these boxes would not supplement the foods purchased with SNAP benefits; rather, they would replace them altogether. The other half of the withheld funds would not benefit the families in any way; they would simply be unavailable.

The Trump administration claims that the government can efficiently and cheaply source, package, and distribute the proposed commodities, thereby saving

money. These savings come at the expense of the poor, as well as the states.

As the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) explains in its analysis of the Trump budget, “The new structure would impose new costs on states, which would be expected to implement the change without adequate financial support. And it would likely force households to incur greater transportation costs (and time) to get food for their families because they may have to pick up the commodities at centralized locations while still traveling to grocery stores for the remainder of their food purchases.”

The CBPP estimates that the changes to SNAP would affect about 34 million people in 16 million households in 2019, almost 90 percent of SNAP participants. The budget calls for an additional \$85 billion in SNAP cuts over ten years. It would force states to withdraw benefits from unemployed adults without dependent children after only three months, making no provision for areas with exceptionally high unemployment rates. Currently, states are allowed waivers from the three-month limit for these areas, but under the terms of the Trump budget they would only be able to waive the requirements in areas with unemployment rates above 10 percent, “an extremely high bar that will miss many locations where few jobs are available to lower-skilled workers.”

Moreover, the three-month limit would be extended to adults between the ages of 50 and 62. Due to the unique challenges of this age group—such as outdated job skills and declining health—finding employment can be particularly difficult.

The budget would bar state programs that phase out benefits more gently as the unemployed start earning again, which will place workers at the mercy of “benefit cliffs” and will subject millions of working

families to heightened food insecurity. Another two million individuals—mostly low-income seniors, the disabled, and households with more than six members—would face reduced benefits, even though current SNAP spending amounts to less than \$2 per person per meal in a household.

SNAP funding is only one of the social programs that the Trump budget fixes its sights upon. Housing budget cuts would see the cessation of housing voucher programs and result in rent increases for people receiving Housing and Urban Development (HUD) rental assistance, forcing them to spend up to 35 percent of their income on housing. Currently, they are required to spend 30 percent of their income. The minimum monthly rent would be raised to \$150. Most of these families currently live below half of the poverty line, and could see their rents double or even triple.

The housing budget also cuts funding for public housing repairs by 47 percent, compared to 2017. Many public housing units date to the immediate post-World War II period; these units are deteriorating and are, in many cases, unsafe. Public housing currently needs more than \$26 billion in repairs; yet instead of upgrading to newer, safer, and more energy efficient units, the Trump budget is effectively defunding what is, in many communities, the only affordable housing for low-income people. Taken alongside the cuts to housing voucher programs, this budget would condemn people to homelessness or to exploitative housing schemes.

Several other social programs have been targeted for cuts or for elimination. The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which helps low-income households pay for utilities, would be eliminated. Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI), which provide aid to disabled people and their dependents, would be cut by \$72 billion. Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) would be cut significantly; its ancillary program, the TANF Contingency Fund block grant, would be eliminated completely. The cessation of the TANF Contingency Fund amounts to a cut of \$21 billion over ten years.

The Social Services Block Grants, which states can use to create and fund social programs, such as job training, childcare assistance, and after school programs

for low-income working families, would be eliminated. The Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG), given to needy students to supplement their Pell Grants, would be eliminated. The Work-Study Program, which allows college students to work on campus to help fund their education, would face significant cuts.

In the midst of these devastating cuts, \$716 billion is proposed for defense spending—a seven percent increase. This would amount to the greatest defense spending buildup since the Reagan administration. On Monday, Trump proudly announced, “So we're going to have the strongest military we've ever had by far. We're increasing arsenals of virtually every weapon. We're modernizing and creating brand new—a brand new nuclear force.”

Donald Trump’s proposed budget is nothing less than a declaration of war—not only upon those caught in the cross hairs of American imperialism, but upon America’s low and moderate income residents.



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