

Nearly 700,000 to lose food stamp benefits under new Trump Administration rule

Meenakshi Jagadeesan
5 December 2019

The Trump administration has announced a new rule aimed at depriving several hundred thousand American citizens of critical food stamp benefits. The Supplementary Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) is currently providing critical federal assistance to over 36 million Americans.

Under existing rules, all able-bodied adults without dependents can receive SNAP benefits only for three months over a three-year period, unless they are working or enrolled in an education or training program for at least 20 hours a week. However, states have been able to waive the work requirement and ensure access to SNAP benefits beyond the time limit given challenging economic conditions. The new rule severely limits the ability of states to apply such waivers.

From April 2020 onwards (when the new rule will take effect), only states that have an official unemployment rate of 6% or above can apply for work waivers. As a comparison, under the current system regions with unemployment rates as low as 2.5% were included in the waived areas. It is anticipated that the new rule will affect about 7% of SNAP recipients, those designated as “Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents” (ABAWD).

The rule aimed at limiting work waivers is tied to two other proposals—one capping deductions for utility allowances, and the other aimed at cutting SNAP benefits for working-class families. A study by the Urban Institute estimates these three proposals combined would cut 3.6 million people from SNAP benefits per month, reduce monthly benefits for millions more, and lead to 982,000 students losing access to reduced-cost or free school meals.

Each of these proposals has been presented by the Trump administration and its supporters as an essential

trimming of a bloated federal budget, and a gesture of respect to hard-working taxpayers. Given the passage of the biggest Pentagon budget as yet, vast amounts spent on the war against immigrants and the massive tax-cuts granted to corporations, this claim holds no water.

Discussing the new rule with reporters on a conference call, Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue used typical right-wing logic: “Americans,” he declared, “were generous people who believe it is their responsibility to help their fellow citizens when they encounter a difficult stretch.” However, it was time to restore “the original intent of food stamps ... moving more able-bodied Americans to self-sufficiency.”

Perdue reiterated this claim in an op-ed published yesterday in the *Arizona Daily Star*. Entitled “The dignity of work and the American dream,” the piece reads like a grotesque caricature of the reality faced by millions of working-class Americans. The economy, Perdue claims, is booming primarily due to “President Trump’s policies ... [which are] putting people back to work and increasing wages.”

If there was any issue, Perdue insisted, it’s simply that “there are more job openings than there are people to fill those spots thanks to President Trump’s actions to cut taxes and remove strangling regulations.” Thus, limiting waivers granted to SNAP recipients would serve the very important purpose of filling those openings and “restore the dignity of work to a sizable segment of our population, while also respecting the taxpayers who fund the program.”

Almost every single statement made in the op-ed—cloaked in nauseating reassertions of the “exceptional generosity of Americans,” for whom Perdue claims to speak—is a willful and blatant misrepresentation of the facts. Claims of a booming

economy brought about single-handedly by the visionary President would ring hollow to a majority of the population, except the extremely wealthy who have undoubtedly benefited from the Trump administration's policies. The unemployment figure of 3.6 percent, touted ad nauseum by the administration and its supporters, is itself highly questionable given that it excludes those who have simply given up any hope of finding jobs. And while jobs have been added to the American economy, these have tended to be lower-paying, hourly wage positions without benefits, forcing working class adults to work multiple jobs in order to eke out a bare existence.

Brandon Lipps, the USDA deputy undersecretary for food nutrition and consumer service, told reporters that the new rule would not affect children, pregnant women, people with disabilities and people over the age of 50. Its target was the ABAWD in the 18–49 age group, 74 percent of whom the USDA estimates are not working. As to why this might be the case, Lipps, following his boss's script, seemed to suggest that it was an absence of desire “to enter and re-enter the workforce.” The new rule, he claimed, rested on the belief that the situation can be changed “so that [the currently unemployed] can know the dignity of work.”

The claim that workers who desperately need a social welfare safety net, primarily because of the predatory policies pushed by the ruling class, somehow need to be taught about the “dignity of work” is perhaps the most offensive of all the falsifications put forth by the USDA. Perdue concluded his op-ed by claiming that people on assistance “need to take responsibility for themselves.” Coming from a member of an administration that embodies the irresponsible, rapacious greed of the capitalist class in its crudest form, this advice would be laughable but for the fact that it is tied to a new assault against the already precarious food security of nearly 700,000 working-class adults.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact