

Trump prepared to starve tens of millions of Americans by allowing food stamp funding to run out Saturday

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The month-long government shutdown is rapidly turning into a social catastrophe, as funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), commonly known as food stamps, is set to expire on November 1. The program provides essential food aid to around 42 million Americans living near or below the official poverty line. Its cutoff would mark, in the words of the CEO of Hunger Free America quoted in *The Guardian*, “the greatest hunger catastrophe in America since the Great Depression, and I don’t say that as hyperbole.”

The immediate impact of the cutoff will vary by state, since SNAP is jointly administered by federal and state agencies. Pennsylvania and Texas have already sent out messages warning recipients that their benefits may be shut off, while the government of Louisiana, one of the poorest states in the country, has announced it is searching for alternative sources of funding to mitigate the impact.

SNAP currently has roughly \$6 billion in contingency funds, enough to finance the program for most of November. At the beginning of the shutdown, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) stated that it was legally required to use those funds to continue operating SNAP during the government shutdown. However, that document has now been deleted from the agency’s website, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP).

The agency now claims it is legally prohibited from using the contingency funding, on the specious grounds that such funds are intended only for natural disasters or similar emergencies. The administration argues that the

government shutdown, which it blames on the Democrats, does not qualify.

A large notice on the USDA website now declares: “Bottom line, the well has run dry ... We are approaching an inflection point for Senate Democrats. They can continue to hold out for healthcare for illegal aliens and gender mutilation procedures or reopen the government so mothers, babies, and the most vulnerable among us can receive critical nutrition assistance.”

The claim that Democrats are demanding funding for healthcare for undocumented immigrants and for gender affirming care is false, and it is illegal under the Hatch Act to post such transparently partisan messages on an official government website. This language is part of the White House’s fascist rhetoric as part of its plans for dictatorship.

In reality, the hunger crisis is being deliberately manufactured by the Trump administration. It is going to allow tens of millions to go hungry as a form of political blackmail over the shutdown, through which Trump is seeking to seize control of the federal budget process from Congress and consolidate executive power.

This is part of a broader policy of class war. Trump has already enacted more than \$180 billion in cuts to SNAP over the next decade under his “Big Beautiful Bill” passed this summer. Even without the shutdown, new eligibility restrictions set to take effect next month would have reduced or eliminated payments for roughly half of all recipients.

At the same time, Trump is threatening to dismantle unnamed “Democrat” and “semi-communist” programs. This clearly refers to food stamps, Medicaid and other social programs enacted decades ago under Democratic administrations, when that party was still associated with limited social reforms. Medicaid alone was also slashed

by more than \$800 billion over the summer.

The administration is also preparing for massive repression. It has reallocated \$8 billion, roughly the same amount required to fund SNAP for an entire month, to pay soldiers during the shutdown. This is designed to ensure their loyalty as the government illegally deploys troops into American cities and moves toward invoking the Insurrection Act. The cost of maintaining food stamp funding is also less than half the \$17.5 billion construction and research and development costs of the USS Gerald Ford aircraft carrier, which has been dispatched to the Caribbean as part of the US military buildup against Venezuela.

The boundaries separating government from the financial oligarchy are being openly dismantled. Soldiers' pay is also being supplemented by a \$130 million "anonymous" donation, later revealed to be from Timothy Mellon, a reclusive billionaire and one of the heirs to the Mellon family fortune originally built by the 19th- and early 20th-century banker, industrialist and Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon.

As the SNAP funding expiration approaches, scenes of growing desperation are already visible. A series of food pantry events in the Washington D.C. area last week drew large crowds of furloughed or fired federal workers. "We're already seeing incredible food insecurity numbers," Abby Fenton, chief advancement officer of the Capitol Area Food Bank, told the *World Socialist Web Site* at one such event last Friday. "Over 36 percent of the folks in our area, which is about 1.5 million households, are experiencing some level of food insecurity already. So with the government shutdown, we felt that because people were missing paychecks, we needed to expand operations."

One terminated federal employee told the WSWS, "While I was on maternity leave, I was fired for no cause. No leave. No severance. Just 'last paycheck, you're out the door.'"

"We are worried about losing our home," she said. "We are constantly applying for jobs, but we were [part] of the first round of the firings. As more people continue to get laid off, furloughed and fired, that means the competition for the employment dramatically increases."

Speaking about the impact of the government's elimination of humanitarian programs administered by the now-abolished US Agency for International Development (USAID), she added: "That's blood on this President's hands. ... It makes us less safe because of the spread of disease. And so it's just continuing to get worse.

"This is the playbook that's been used in other dictatorships and authoritarian regimes. It's exactly—they're doing it perfect, play by play. And what's unfortunate is that there's not enough being done to stop [Trump]," she said, referring to the inaction of the Democratic Party even as millions took to the streets in the October 18 demonstrations.

Democratic Representatives Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut and Angie Craig of Minnesota issued a joint statement last week calling the impending food stamp cutoff "perhaps the most cruel and unlawful offense the Trump administration has perpetrated yet." But the Democratic Party's real response has been to redouble its appeals for Trump to see reason and agree to a deal.

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries told *CBS News* on Sunday, "There is an urgent need to reopen the government, which is why we continue to demand that Republicans sit at the negotiating table so we can enact a spending agreement that's *bipartisan in nature* [emphasis added]."

The call for a "bipartisan agreement" is code for a deal that includes sweeping social spending cuts, possibly offset by a token or cosmetic concession on Medicaid to provide Democrats with political cover. This is the same political theater that has characterized every budget crisis for decades.

But Trump is not playing by the ordinary rules, as the Democrats are well aware. In a recent interview, Trump loyalist Steve Bannon openly admitted the existence of a secret plan to allow Trump to remain in office beyond constitutional term limits, effectively establishing a dictatorship. Yet the Democrats refuse to oppose him because they fear the mass, working class movement required to defeat Trump far more than they fear the prospect of dictatorship itself.

The situation underscores the necessity for such a movement—an independent mobilization of the working class, opposed to both capitalist parties and to the capitalist system as a whole. This is what the Socialist Equality Party fights for.



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