

“It must be stopped”: Furloughed government workers speak out against shutdown, threats to food stamps at DC-area food banks

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On Saturday, food stamp processing for over 42 million American households came to a halt as the Trump administration enacted one of the crudest attacks on working people in American history.

The administration’s “hunger plan” is aimed at starving the population into submission. It is part of his attempt to build a fascist dictatorship to police record levels of inequality which are only growing as a result of his policies, while also sending enormous sums to expand the military and prepare for world war.

On Friday, a federal court rejected the White House’s bogus argument that it could not legally use a \$5.5 billion emergency fund intended to support the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as food stamps. This is not only how the funds have been used in previous shutdowns, but, as well, was part of the US Department of Agriculture’s original plan for the current shutdown.

However, the ruling was not in time to prevent a delay in the disbursement of funds, and the Trump administration is seeking to drag this delay out as long as possible, claiming that it needs “clarification” from the court about how this money could be used.

Meanwhile, federal workers, having already been culled by hundreds of thousands since Trump took office, have now gone more than a month without pay under the shutdown. Nowhere has that been felt harder than in the Washington D.C. region.

The region is home to the largest concentration of federal workers in the United States. About 186,500 federal jobs are based in Washington D.C. alone, making up nearly a quarter of all jobs in the city. Across the broader metro region, about 449,500 federal employees are located in D.C. and the adjoining states.

Washington D.C. was reported to have been in recession

as early as the summer, following the Elon Musk-driven “Department of Government Efficiency” mass firings.

The Capital Area Food Bank (CAFB) has organized a series of food distribution events in the Washington D.C. region to meet the colossal need for food facing federal employees in District of Columbia, Virginia, Maryland and West Virginia. A spokesperson for the charity told the WSWS that “over 36 percent of the folks in our area, which is about 1.5 million households, are experiencing some level of food insecurity already” before the shutdown occurred.

A worker at the LindaBen Foundation in Beltsville, Maryland, which helped organize the distribution, explained that, for the majority of people, “the American Dream” had now become “the American Nightmare.”

“It is very difficult, not just for US federal employees,” a furloughed worker told the *World Socialist Web Site* at a recent food bank event. “The situation started when this new government took office.”

“You know, everything was already expensive. A lot of us, maybe the majority, were living paycheck to paycheck. Now it’s even worse. Everything is more expensive. You basically barely can make ends meet, because everything is just so expensive and we don’t get increases. We haven’t got a cost-of-living increase in the agency that I worked for two years.”

“All of my co-workers, we’re trying to support each other as much as possible,” said a furloughed National Institute of Health worker. “So that’s what we’re going through right now: hardship. We’re civil servants, and our base pay is nothing.”

“For the month of October, we were only paid 60 hours. We were short 20 hours on our first paycheck, and the next paycheck, we were furloughed for 80 hours. So far, I’ve gone 100 hours without pay. So, you know, it’s very hard. I have a son in university. [I have] my mortgage, and frankly,

I don't have a rainy day fund. You know, I've been in contact with my mortgage company and some other people that I owe."

The worker explained that her family residing abroad was suffering the effects of the category 5 Hurricane Melissa in the Caribbean. Due to the shutdown, the worker was powerless to send aid to her family.

A federal electrical engineer said: "I was furloughed but I am not sure for how long I will be able to stay home without work. I want to continue to support my family."

He concluded: "Government employees should not be punished for the shutdown since they have nothing to do with it. The American people don't deserve that and it must be stopped."

"I have a daughter and a niece that rely on SNAP and WIC (Women, Infant and Children)" assistance, said Jimena. "Typically my daughter relies on me but because I'm now being impacted by the furlough. This is going to hurt my family: my grandkids, my daughter, my nieces," she explained.

Jimena explained that since being furloughed she had been working gig jobs such as Uber and Amazon. "I get up at 2:45 AM to do an Amazon shift at 3:45 AM in the morning. I have to be there by 3:30 AM. It's a 4 hour shift and then right after that I do Uber until 1 or 2 PM. I'm usually tired, but I feel good that there's something that I can do to help my family." Despite this, the various gig jobs only net about "25-30 percent of what I used to make. It's not enough to pay all the bills."

Some federal workers have not received a full paycheck in three pay periods. Nearly one in six federal workers employed by the Executive Branch alone make less than the national median salary of \$62,000 a year.

Nationally, over 1.4 million federal workers out of 2.4 million federal jobs in total nationwide are either furloughed or working without pay during the shutdown. Broken down proportionately, since no exact data on the number of impacted workers exists regionally, that means approximately 125,000 Washington D.C.-region workers are currently without pay.

"My whole life I have planned on a crisis that never happened. It's now that time," one worker said at the Beltsville charity. The worker, who had nearly 40 years of government service, stated "here I am today, all these years later, being on the dependent end, something I had never wanted to be."

In Maryland, the Democratic Party-led government declared a state of emergency on Thursday in anticipation of SNAP benefits running out. Democratic governor Wesley Moore announced on social media last week that the state would "surge" \$10 million to food banks statewide.

This is a mere drop in the bucket. "Food pantries are not designed to substitute larger programs meant to fight food insecurity, such as SNAP," noted the *Washington Post* last week. It added, "one food bank meal is equal to approximately nine meals provided by SNAP."

Speaking to the WSWS, a federal worker with 40 years of experience said: "This is not the first shutdown I've had to work through. I did it [in 2018-2019] for 35 days."

"It looks like this one's going to go even longer," explained another worker. "Now, it's innocent Americans that [Trump's] attacking," referring to the SNAP cuts.

"People who just go about their daily lives, right? Cutting off their food, right? How do you cut off somebody's way of living? You can have money to pay this bill or that bill, but if you don't have food to eat you can't do anything. Babies have nothing to do with it."

Workers denounced the administration's vicious assault on working-class people throughout the world, including in Venezuela, where Trump seeks to begin enacting a regime-change operation against the Maduro government.

"He said just the other day that they're shooting people out on boats, claiming that they are drug dealers, claiming they're part of the cartel, and he's just killing people."

"It's amazing to me. Everything that his family has taken advantage of, every opportunity in this country that his entire family has taken advantage of, he's taken away from the everyday, simple, regular people who just want to go to work every day."

"I'm from Latin America, I'm a brown person, and they are detaining everybody that is not white, basically, with all this law enforcement, FBI and every agency that they are using, even the National Guard, which is illegal, you know, just profiling people because they are not white."

"It's a government of the oligarchy. I mean, they are controlling the government, and they are disrespecting, they are violating the Constitution."



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