

Food pantries see record demand, as government shutdown becomes longest on record

Jacob Crosse
6 November 2025

The United States entered the 37th day of the longest government shutdown in history on Thursday, surpassing the 2018–2019 impasse under the first Trump administration. What began on October 1 has rapidly evolved into a social and economic catastrophe for millions of working people.

More than 1.4 million federal employees have gone without pay since September, including air traffic controllers and Transportation Security Administration (TSA) screeners. On Wednesday, Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy announced that 10 percent of US flight capacity would be cut across 40 airports, triggering hundreds of thousands of cancellations and delays ahead of the holiday season.

At the same time, Trump's forced hunger policy will slash food stamp benefits for 42 million Americans under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). An analysis from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities found that "Nearly 1.2 million SNAP households with roughly 4.9 million people—roughly 1 in 9 SNAP recipients—will receive zero benefits."

The same report found that "[N]early 5.4 million households with one or two members will receive a minimum benefit of \$12 for November." All SNAP participants, of which 39 percent are children, will receive less than they should have.

On Thursday, Chief Judge John J. McConnell of the U.S. District Court ordered the administration to resume full payments by Friday, writing that "[W]ithout SNAP funding for the month of November, sixteen million children will be immediately at risk of going hungry. This should never happen in America."

Trump's Justice Department immediately signaled it would appeal the ruling, guaranteeing weeks, if not months, of further deprivation.

Millions of people across the United States are turning to food pantries to survive. In West Virginia, where 270,000 people rely on SNAP benefits which have yet to arrive, Facing Hunger Foodbank distributed "75 tons of food across the 12 counties during the first weekend in November, more than double what it distributes in a typical weekend," reported Mountain State Spotlight.

In Pierce County, Washington, home to Tacoma, nearly 118,000 residents rely on SNAP every month. KNKX, the local NPR affiliate, reported that local food banks have seen a 40 percent increase in visits since the start of the shutdown.

In the Dallas-Fort Worth area, the number of families seeking food pantry assistance at Central Storehouse in Fort Worth has jumped from the high 180s per day to 210–225, as SNAP benefits vanish and federal workers go unpaid. In West Texas, over 100,000 people across 19 counties are newly pushed onto food bank rolls, and one distribution site recently served 851 cars in a single morning, a surge unseen since the COVID-19 peak.

The ongoing shutdown comes amid a wave of layoffs not seen since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic or the 2008 financial crisis. Private placement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas reported 153,000 job cuts in October 2025, up 175 percent from the same month last year—the highest October total in more than two decades.

"This is the highest total for October in over 20 years, and the highest for any single month in the fourth quarter since 2008," said Andy Challenger, the firm's chief revenue officer. "Like in 2003, a disruptive technology is changing the landscape."

That "disruptive technology" is artificial intelligence, which corporations are rushing to deploy as they slash payrolls. Nearly 47,900 warehouse and logistics workers lost their jobs in October alone, including thousands at

UPS, which has continued mass buyouts after the so-called “historic” 2023 Teamsters contract signed by union president Sean O’Brien.

The technology sector announced 33,281 job cuts in October, bringing the 2025 total to 141,000, a 17 percent increase over last year.

The report also identified Trump’s Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE)—formerly headed by billionaire Elon Musk—as the leading reason for layoffs this year, citing it for nearly 294,000 planned cuts, including federal contractors. Another 21,000 cuts were attributed to “DOGE Downstream Impact,” caused by the loss of federal funding to private and nonprofit entities.

While DOGE-induced cuts have devastated hundreds of thousands of workers and their families, Musk, the world’s richest man and a notorious neo-Nazi, has been showered with new wealth. On Thursday, Tesla shareholders approved a trillion-dollar pay package for the tech mogul that could make him the first-ever trillionaire.

While workers are thrown into unemployment by Musk’s “efficiency” schemes, the oligarchy rewards him with historic levels of personal enrichment.

Workers laid off are finding it increasingly hard to land a new job as hiring has simultaneously collapsed. Employers have announced only 488,000 planned hires so far this year, down 35 percent from this same point in 2024 and the lowest year-to-date total since 2011.

The growing crisis is mirrored in consumer confidence data showing that optimism among low income workers has plunged to its lowest point in years.

Bloomberg, citing the Conference Board, found confidence among households earning under \$50,000 has collapsed since mid-2024, even as those making over \$200,000 have grown more upbeat thanks to soaring stock prices.

The richest 10 percent of US households now account for nearly half of all consumer spending, fueled by financial gains and asset inflation, while workers slash purchases to survive amid withheld pay and mass layoffs.

Economist Peter Atwater compared the situation to a “top-heavy Jenga tower”—a system so imbalanced that a single wrong move could send it crashing down. The metaphor captures the parasitic character of American capitalism: a speculative, debt-driven economy resting on the backs of an increasingly impoverished majority.

Even Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell has been forced to acknowledge a “bifurcated” economy, one that channels wealth to the top while leaving the base to

crumble.

While millions go hungry and jobless, the Democratic Party has responded by begging Trump to negotiate on reopening the government, without placing any limits on his dictatorial powers. Following the mass “No Kings” protests last month, Democratic leaders urged Trump and congressional Republicans to restore Affordable Care Act subsidies, arguing that doing so would prevent “price shocks” and maintain insurance company profits.

Trump has so far rejected Democratic entreaties, labeling the Democrats “radicalized lunatics” and calling on Senate Republicans to abolish the filibuster in order to ram through his budget unilaterally. On social media Thursday he wrote:

“The Democrats will terminate the Filibuster in THE FIRST HOUR, if and when they assume ‘control’ or power. Republicans have what the Democrats want—We should do it, NOW, and have the greatest three years in History!”

The attacks on jobs, wages and basic social rights flow from the growth of inequality that is intrinsic to capitalism itself. The defense of the right to food, shelter and dignified work requires a frontal assault on the hoarded wealth of the financial oligarchy.

The election of Zohran Mamdani as New York City mayor—a self-described “democratic socialist”—reflects the growing left-wing sentiment among workers and youth, but his party’s role in propping up Trump’s government proves that the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and the Democrats are no vehicle for genuine change.

The working class must form its own organizations of struggle—rank-and-file committees in every workplace, independent of both capitalist parties and their union accomplices. These committees must link up internationally, uniting workers across borders against the multinational corporations and their political servants.

Only through the expropriation of the financial aristocracy and the establishment of workers’ power on a world scale can the scourges of war, poverty and hunger be abolished once and for all.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact