

Furloughed federal employee in Washington D.C.

“We’re doing civil service for this country, nobody’s looking out for us and we’re the ones standing in the food line”

Our reporters
7 November 2025

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A reporter from the *World Socialist Web Site* visited a food bank in Bellingham, Washington, approximately 90 miles north of Seattle, and spoke with volunteers and people who stood in line for food assistance because they have lost their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Plan (SNAP) benefits.

Sandy, a volunteer at the food bank as well as other local food distribution locations and shelters, described the increase in the number of people seeking food assistance after their SNAP benefits were stopped, saying, “The line-up outside has doubled since the cut-off, and there is a large increase in the volume of food need. Our suppliers are stepping up, but there is a lag time to respond to this.”

Sandy said the food bank was a supplement before the cut-off, adding, “Now they are relying on us to make up what they are no longer getting. Demand always increases at the end of the month, when people’s benefits run out, but now we’re seeing that kind of demand already at the beginning of the month, and it’s only the first week.”

Michael, who came to the food bank for the first time, said, “I used to volunteer at the Union Gospel Mission myself. It really drains you seeing the effects all of this has on people in society. I just lost my job as a day laborer. That’s why I need to come here today.”

Randy explained his situation, “I just moved into a tiny home at Gardenviwe, after being homeless for a couple of years. I’m picking up today for myself and

an elderly lady who lives near me. She can’t get out here herself. I used to get \$300 per month in SNAP, but when I called the office, they said they don’t have anything coming for me anymore.”

Rebecca’s situation revealed the impact of the SNAP cuts on families. She said, “I have a family of five. The benefits were really helping us survive. Now we’re struggling to find food. This place helps a lot. My husband works, but he also has to do DoorDash on top of that just for us to make ends meet.”

The crisis is having a devastating impact on working class and poor people of all ages. Michelle, 69, said, “I get SNAP, but they only give me \$24 every month because I own a car. It’s ridiculous. I live in that car! I’ve been living in my car on-and-off for the last four years, now again since February. I get Social Security, but that is also barely anything. It is not enough to survive.”

In Portland, Oregon, the WSWS spoke with Alicia, a young worker, who said, “I live in a very low income neighborhood, where myself and many of my neighbors benefit from SNAP and WIC. At first, the energy here was palpably angry, followed quickly by a desire to calm down and share resources. There were food access events posted on the neighborhood Facebook page, food bank times and locations, after-school programs by local churches, things like that.”

Alicia explained the impact of the SNAP cuts on the mood of people in her neighborhood, “Now, it has shifted again, to one of confusion and uncertainty. It reminds me of the time shortly before COVID hit, when we had all started to hear rumors, but nothing had

really changed yet. It isn't hard to feel the anxiety around the neighborhood, but I don't think the anger is gone. I think that there is still real rage behind the fear."

Alicia also spoke about the immediate lead-up to the end of SNAP benefits, "In the last week of October, people were stocking up on bulk staples like rice and beans in preparation. Myself and a lot of others made sure to get the 20-pound bags of rice because we don't know if we'll have enough food otherwise. And it's especially bad considering the holidays are coming up.

"I think it's making a lot of people think very seriously about our society. We are being forced to band together and cooperate, and that could be very radicalizing."

A WSWS reporter spoke with a furloughed federal employee at a food bank in Washington D.C. Charities and organizations in the area have organized events exclusively for unpaid and furloughed federal workers due to the high level of need in the area.

The furloughed worker said, "I'm a federal worker and I'm a military reservist. I'm trying to make ends meet right now. I'm currently DoorDashing with my wife since yesterday. I've been working all night and we'll work all day today, too, taking a nap in the car.

"I had to withdraw from my Thrift Savings Plan and my 401 since I was laid off.

"I feel like we're being used as pawns. Like, I don't know what it is they talk about 'making America great,' they're essentially spitting on all the federal workers. We're doing civil service for this country, and nobody's looking out for us, and we're the ones standing in the food line. I never thought I'll be the person standing in line for the food bank, to be honest.

"I've been deployed, came back home to this job, and now I'm in line for a food bank, like, literally."



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