After midterm debacle, Trump moves to cut 6.3 million people off food stamps

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One week after voters delivered the sharpest repudiation of a sitting president's party in half a century, the Trump administration has answered with a new attack on working people's social rights. On Tuesday, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) published a proposed rule that, by its own estimate, would strip food assistance from 6.3 million people in 3.2 million households—nearly one in five recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps.

The rule would abolish "broad-based categorical eligibility" (BBCE), under which 46 states enroll households in SNAP if they receive services funded by the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, such as childcare help or job training. Using this provision, 37 states have lifted the gross income cutoff above the federal limit of 130 percent of the poverty line, and 41 have waived the federal asset test. The USDA would restrict automatic eligibility to households receiving TANF cash aid. Trump first proposed the measure in 2019, and it was withdrawn under Biden in 2021. Its revival was called for in the right-wing Heritage Foundation's Project 2025.

USDA projects a cut of $44.65 billion in federal SNAP spending over fiscal years 2027–2031. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) puts these cuts at roughly $15 billion a year once phased in, more than 15 percent of the program.

This is the first major assault on social programs since the November 3 election, which registered mass opposition to the war against Iran, the persecution of immigrants and the destruction of social programs. As the Democrats plead "bipartisan common ground," Trump and the financial oligarchy he represents intend to press ahead with war abroad and class war at home.

Gasoline averaged $4.02 a gallon nationally on November 8, according to AAA, roughly a dollar more than a year ago, driven up by the war on Iran. Consumer prices rose 3.7 percent in the 12 months through September, while average hourly earnings rose only 3.0 percent, a cut in real wages.

Federal Reserve data for the second quarter of 2026 show the top 1 percent of households holding a record 32.5 percent of the country's wealth, about $60 trillion, while the bottom half holds just 2.3 percent. The richest 0.1 percent alone hold 15 percent.

In his lecture "Capitalist Crisis, Imperialist War and the World Socialist Revolution, delivered at the University of California, Berkeley on the day of the mid-term elections, David North noted that between 2022 and 2025 "the real median wealth of families in the top 10 percent of the income distribution rose 31 percent, while that of the bottom 20 percent fell by 6 percent."

North rooted the drive to war and dictatorship in the objective crisis of American capitalism: an economy resting on a speculative bubble in artificial intelligence stocks and a national debt that has passed $40 trillion, for which the working class is to be made to pay. The $15 billion a year to be taken from the hungry amounts to only 1/40th of 1 percent of the wealth of the top 1 percent.

The new USDA rule comes on top of the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" (OBBBA), signed by Trump on July 4, 2025, which slashed $187 billion from SNAP through 2034 and more than $1 trillion from federal health programs, including $793 billion from Medicaid, to finance tax cuts for the rich, the military and the anti-immigrant dragnet.

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) predicted that 2.4 million people would lose food stamps due to the OBBBA. In fact, SNAP enrollment fell by 5.5 million, or 13 percent, between July 2025 and July 2026, to 36.1 million, the lowest level in 17 years, according to CBPP. About 2 million children will see their food aid cut. SNAP enrollment has already fallen by roughly half in Arizona and by more than 20 percent in Florida. With unemployment flat, the decline has nothing to do with reduced need.

The law extended the requirement to "work or starve" to adults up to age 64 and to parents of children 14 and older, eliminated exemptions for veterans and the homeless, and ended eligibility for many immigrants with lawful status. Beginning in October 2027, most states will for the first time pay 5 to 15 percent of benefit costs, depending on their payment error rates—a standing incentive for them to delay and deny.

Health coverage is following the same path. Georgetown University's Center for Children and Families reports that 2.56

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million fewer children were enrolled in Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) in August 2026 than in January 2025. Medicaid work requirements, which the CBO estimates will leave 5.3 million more people uninsured by 2034, take effect January 1.

The USDA presents BBCE as a "loophole" that, in the words of a department spokesperson, has "bloated the welfare rolls for decades." To prove this point, the department estimates 2 million people in 1.2 million households have incomes above the federal limits, and 5.4 million people in 2.5 million households have savings or other assets above the federal resource limit. They should therefore be struck from the rolls.

The first group identified by USDA consists of 2 million people in working families whose gross pay is slightly above 130 percent of the poverty line—about $35,500 a year for a family of three—but whose rent and childcare costs leave too little for groceries.

The 5.4 million in the second group consists of seniors, people with disabilities and laid-off workers with modest savings. The federal asset test disqualifies most households with more than a few thousand dollars in the bank. A worker who loses a job will have to exhaust the family's cushion before qualifying for help with food. More than 840,000 one- and two-person households receive only the minimum benefit of $23 a month.

Children will be hit twice. Some 1.78 million would lose automatic certification for free school meals. The USDA claims that 97 percent could requalify by separate application, but by its own count 28,000 would have to pay full price, 42,000 would lose summer food benefits and 5,500 women, infants and children would lose access to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

States will have to verify the assets of millions of applicants, at an added cost of $928.5 million, just as federal administrative funding is being slashed. Advocates warn that families with immigrant members will be afraid to submit the paperwork for fear it might identify them to the ICE Gestapo.

Representative Angie Craig, the ranking Democrat on the House Agriculture Committee, called the rule "heartless and cruel"—and then appealed to congressional Republicans to join the Democrats in opposing it. Representative Brad Schneider declared that Democrats were "ready to end the cuts and restore funding."

The new Congress, seated January 3 with Democratic majorities in both houses, could block the rule by legislation, an appropriations rider or, once it is final, a resolution under the Congressional Review Act. Reversing the cutoffs already carried out would require repeal of the OBBBA's provisions. Each of these measures is subject to Trump's veto, which takes two-thirds of both houses to override. The Democrats can be expected to point to this arithmetic to explain why nothing can be done, while Democratic state attorneys general file suit and consign the fate of millions to the courts, under conditions where the Trump administration has rejected the authority of the judiciary and openly defied them.

The Democrats' response to the election has been to extend a hand to Trump. Hakeem Jeffries, the incoming House speaker, declared his party "ready, willing and able to find bipartisan common ground." Barack Obama called for a politics that "brings people together rather than divides them." The *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* have spelled out what this means: deficit reduction and cuts to social spending.

The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) will provide the left cover. The DSA now has eight members in the House, and its members have been elected mayor in the two largest US cities, New York and Los Angeles. They will issue statements deploring the cuts. But they sit in Jeffries' caucus, and New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani has met with Trump three times and urged Democrats to seek shared aims with him. Facing a multibillion-dollar budget gap, he has ordered two rounds of agency cuts of his own. As North explained in his lecture, the DSA's program accepts the wage system and keeps its supporters inside the Democratic Party.

The WSWS wrote after the election that "Popular sentiment is far to the left of the Democratic Party." The opposition expressed at the polls will not remain confined to the ballot box. It is already emerging in strikes and strike deadlines among nurses, graduate students and public employees. As a party of Wall Street, it is this upsurge of workers' struggles that the Democrats fear.

Workers cannot accept the capitalist framework in which both parties operate, where the wealth of the oligarchy and the cost of its wars are untouchable. Food and healthcare are social rights. Securing them requires the rescinding of every cut, an end to the wars and the expropriation of the fortunes of the billionaires.

This means building rank-and-file committees in workplaces and neighborhoods, independent of the Democrats and the union apparatus. Above all, it means building a new political leadership in the working class, the Socialist Equality Party, to fight for workers' power and the socialist reorganization of economic life to meet human need, not private profit.

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