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USA

Trump Takes Food from the Poor Poor during Budget Crisis

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President Donald Trump has taken advantage of the current budget crisis, which has lasted more than a month, shutting down the federal government, to stop funding food programs that affect tens of million. Trump said the shutdown provided an opportunity to close “Democrat programs that we want to close up or we never wanted to happen.” By “Democrat programs” he means social welfare programs that provide food and education to low-income people.

The Republicans and Democrats have not been able to come to agreement on the federal budget, largely because the Democrats refuse to vote for a new budget without guarantees that the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which provides health insurance coverage to 44 million Americans, would be continued. Open enrollment for ACA began on November 1, but many have been shocked to find that their ACA insurance premiums have risen, in some cases astronomically. A single person earning \$32,000 a year who way paying \$58 a month will now have to pay about \$180, an increase of \$1,468 per year. Similarly, a family of four earning \$66,000 annually could see the payment rise from about \$121 to \$373 per month, an increase of roughly \$3,025 annually. While ACA is a federal program, some states provide subsidies that make it more affordable, so costs can differ from state to state. In New Jersey premiums would rise more than 175 percent and in Colorado by 101 percent.

In an attempt to protect their constituents from these rising costs, Democrats refused to vote for the budget, and the government shutdown. Trump has taken advantage of the government closure to fund programs he likes, such as the military and the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), while shutting down others.

Trump has stopped funds for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as “food stamps,” that provides food to 42 million people with low or no income, that is, to 12.5 percent of all Americans. Most recipients are children, the elderly, or the disabled. One has to understand that in the United States Poverty and economic inequality are endemic. There are 100,000 children from homeless families in New York City alone.

The program distributes over \$90 billion a year, about 10 percent of all spending on groceries, a benefit therefore to grocery stores. In some poor neighborhoods, the small, family-owned store’s customers may be 75 to 90 percent food stamp customers. The SNAP program, run by the Department of Agriculture, also subsidizes the farmers who provide the food and therefore benefits rural communities.

Federal judges have ordered Trump to fund SNAP using the government’s six-billion-dollar contingency fund, but Trump told his lawyers to ask for more specific instructions.

Trump has also stopped funding for about 10% of the Head Start Program, a pre-school education program that serves 750,000 children from low-income families. Head Start also provides food and health services to these children.

The first U.S. food stamp program was set up in 1939 under President Franklin D. Roosevelt, a Democrat, and the current program began in 1964, created under Democrats President Lyndon B. Johnson. And Head Start was created by President Johnson in 1965. As Trump says these programs were created by Democrats, but many of the beneficiaries are Republicans, and Trump’s cuts will hurt them too.

Many of those who marched on October 18 in the No Kings protests held in 2,700 cities and towns and involving

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seven million protestors had signs criticizing Trump's attack on working people and the poor. And this month there will be elections for governors and state legislators as well as six special elections to Congress to replace representatives who have resigned or died. We will see how Trump's latest act of cruelty affects those races.

2 November 2025

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