

## DeSaulnier: Trump food-stamp cuts would increase hunger

Millions don't know where next meal will come from; millions more won't by next Thanksgiving if president prevails

By Mark DeSaulnier |

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Rep. Mark DeSaulnier  
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As we sit down for Thanksgiving dinner, let's think of the millions of Americans who don't know where their next meal will come from — and the millions more who will be in the same predicament by next Thanksgiving if the president has his way.

Following Donald Trump's unprecedented giveaway to billionaires and corporations, he lamented "a person who is not working at all and has no intention of working at all is making more money and doing better than the person that's working his and her ass off."

He acted by attacking social safety-net programs, like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the program formerly known as food stamps and now known in California as CalFresh. SNAP is the nation's largest domestic food assistance program that gives financial support to families that cannot always afford to put food on the table.

The president and congressional Republicans are using the budget on this crusade to undermine SNAP. In his 2019 budget, President Trump proposes slashing SNAP by \$17.2 billion, which would leave at least 4 million people hungry.

Republicans have also proposed funding cuts through reauthorization of the Farm Bill by trimming as much as \$75 per month from monthly benefits for up to 1.1 million families.

Farm Bill negotiations are currently underway and, while we cannot predict the outcome, it is clear that House Republicans and the president are after a funding cut however they can get it. And they want to get this done before Democrats, who do not support these cuts, take over the majority in the House in January.

The administration is not leaving the cutting to Congress, though, and has proposed its own way to hinder the program. Currently, the rules of the program require all SNAP recipients who are able-bodied adults without dependents to be employed at least 20 hours a week. Recognizing regional differences in access to work, states or localities can apply for a waiver to this rule to decrease the hardship on families.

The administration proposes a rule change that would eliminate waivers altogether except in exceedingly rare circumstances. This change would go back on more than 20 years of precedent and would endanger benefits nationwide.

California had a statewide waiver for nearly a decade before it expired this year, but most counties still have individual waivers. By this time in 2019, 52 of the state's 58 counties could still be covered by waivers. Those counties would be in danger of losing those waivers if the administration's rule change goes into effect. Further, if the state goes through another economic downturn, it would be at risk of not qualifying for future waivers.

The administration's proposal is still in draft form, but it is almost universally recognized that the administration will wield its power to see this through in one form or another. It could take months or longer to go into effect.

While work is the best path to self-sufficiency, threatening someone with hunger is cruel and in no way incentivizes employment. Our duty as a nation is to provide for all Americans and ensure that they can live healthy and successful lives. Federal nutrition programs reflect that commitment.

Rather than cutting funding and imposing arbitrary requirements, we should invest in job training and workforce development while also protecting successful safety-net programs like CalFresh. With additional support, we will see much more success in assisting families to enter the workforce and attain well-paying jobs, which in the long term can help them transition off CalFresh when they are ready.

The Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano has already facilitated two community-wide meetings on the topic and local community colleges are poised to roll out employment and training programs on their campuses early next year.

This holiday season, I am grateful to live in a community that is already coming together to protect our most vulnerable residents. We must all continue to fight Trump's policies

and protect nutrition programs and those they serve so that everyone can enjoy a plentiful Thanksgiving — this year and all the years to come.

*Rep. Mark DeSaulnier, D-Concord, represents most of Contra Costa County.*