



The Government Shutdown and our Food Crisis

By: Stephanie Stinnett

Chances are that if you've read or watched the news lately you've heard about the government shutdown that is looming over our country at the moment. Federal workers, 450,000 of them, are forced to work without pay. Soon federal programs like WIC and food stamps, that millions rely on, will be affected as well.

Due to the overwhelming number of federal workers who have now gone without pay for a month, food banks are starting to become strained. If food stamps are affected during the shutdown that will put even more strain on the already struggling food banks. Currently food banks across the state of North Carolina receive a portion of their supplies through the USDA programs such as the Emergency Food Assistance Program, but that funding could also soon run out as well. Food bank operators are starting to become anxious at the threat of losing funding mixed with an overwhelming amount of people in need of food.

Almost 38.6 million Americans rely on SNAP (food stamps) to help supplement their monthly grocery budget. Some rely solely on SNAP for their food. Currently SNAP has funding through the end of January, but what will happen if everyone wakes up February 1st and the government is still shut down? There is currently a \$3 billion reserve in place for February in case the shutdown continues, but that would mean a cut of around \$90 for households receiving SNAP, and when the average monthly SNAP benefit is \$245 that \$90 cut can hurt a lot. After this reserve is used there is no telling what the agency would be able to do to help feed the people relying on SNAP.

WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) is another program designed to help supplement the food budgets of nearly 7 million women, infants, and children under age 5. WIC also only has funding through the month of January. Last week the Food and Nutrition Service division announced that it was planning on giving the excess funds to the state agencies to help supplement the program so that it can remain in operation. This would only be a temporary solution and would push back the cutoff date into possibly mid-February. Even then states may not have funding to allow any new women in need to sign up.

According to the USDA child nutrition programs, such as free or reduced lunches for school children, are very important because they provide children with healthy meals and fight hunger. These programs will be funded through February. They also provide free breakfasts and after school meals to children in need. Many children rely on these programs, and sometimes they are their only source of food. If the program were to lose funding that would mean millions of children may lose their only source of food as the shutdown continues.

Millions of Americans are at risk for not having enough food, or no food at all. Those Americans who are already struggling with food insecurity are now facing even more anxiety about how they will feed their families. If the shutdown continues for much longer, we will have a national crisis on our hands.

Sources:

<http://www.wunc.org/post/government-shutdown-threatens-food-banks-and-food-benefits>

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&source=undefined&cd=&ved=0ahUKEwigsvqTwt3fAhVPIDQIHTHmA8AQzPwBCAM&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cnn.com%2F2019%2F01%2F07%2Fpolitics%2Ffood-stamps-government-shutdown%2Findex.html&psig=AOvVaw1z5UNmfgCIEcLvDfiO4x2S&ust=154701393975301>

9