



## House Passes Measure to Cut Costs of Food Stamp Program

In a close vote Thursday, the U.S. House of Representatives approved 217-210 a measure that cuts food stamps by \$39 billion over the next decade — a move that is expected to provoke a political showdown with Democrats. The bill failed to garner a single Democratic vote; 15 Republicans voted against the bill, as well.



The legislation cuts twice as much from food stamps as a bill that failed in the House in June, and cuts significantly more than the \$4.5 billion cuts in a Senate measure that passed earlier this year.

*USA Today* [reported](#), “The bill would cause 3 million people to lose benefits while another 850,000 would see their benefits cuts, according to the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office.”

Thursday’s measure is a revised version of a bill passed by the House Agriculture Committee that would have cut \$20 billion from the program by preventing states from automatically qualifying people for the program simply because they are enrolled in other anti-poverty programs. But earlier this week, Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.) introduced the revised version of the bill that cuts costs by \$40 billion by adding even stricter requirements for able-bodied recipients to either be working or actively looking for work.

“This bill makes getting Americans back to work a priority again for our nation’s welfare programs,” House Speaker John Boehner said.

Republicans assert that the bill would meet the food stamp program’s original eligibility limits and preserve the program for families that truly need it.

“This bill eliminates loopholes, ensures work requirements, and puts us on a fiscally responsible path,” said Representative Marlin Stutzman (R-Ind.), who led efforts to split the food stamps program from the overall farm bill. “In the real world, we measure success by results. It’s time for Washington to measure success by how many families are lifted out of poverty and helped back on their feet, not by how much Washington bureaucrats spend year after year.”

The White House has already threatened to veto the bill if it makes its way to President Obama’s desk. Likewise, the Senate has indicated that it does not intend to pass the House measure.

“House Republicans’ vote to deny nutrition assistance to hungry, low-income Americans is shameful,” declared Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.). “The Senate will never pass such a hateful, punitive legislation.”

The debate over cuts to the food stamp program delayed passage of the \$500-billion farm bill wherein the food stamp program was outlined, leaving farm policy in political purgatory, as the current law determining farm policy is set to expire on September 30. The *New York Times* [explained](#), “Historically,



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the food stamp program has been part of the farm bill, a huge piece of legislation that had routinely been passed every five years, authorizing financing for the nation's farm and nutrition programs."

The House rejected the bill in June when Democrats argued that the cuts were too significant and Republicans asserted the costs in the bill remained too high despite the cuts.

Weeks after the bill failed, the House decided to break it into two separate parts, one dealing with the subsidy and conservation section, and the other with the food stamp program.

The Department of Agriculture states that the cost of food stamps has increased dramatically over the past decade. In 2001, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) served 17 million people, costing slightly above \$15 billion. This year, however, there are 47.8 million enrolled, costing \$75 billion annually.

Republicans blame the dramatic increase on failed eligibility procedures that have allowed more people to enroll in the program than was originally intended.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, the cost of the SNAP program under current law would total \$764 billion over the next decade. The Republican measure would reduce those costs just five percent, saving \$39 billion. The Congressional Budget Office notes that under the House bill, four million people would be removed from the food stamp program starting next year, with three million people per year being cut after that.

Democrats claim that they are not opposed to cuts to the SNAP program, but that the Republican efforts are simply too dramatic. "I'm certain that we could embrace as House Democrats some measure of cuts," said Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-Fla.), chairwoman of the Democratic National Committee. "I mean, every program can benefit from some savings. But the first go-round the Republicans' proposed cut was \$20 billion. Then they passed an amendment that was \$31.4 billion. And now that still isn't good enough for the Tea Partiers. Now we're at \$40 billion. What they're saying is that in America it's OK for people to go hungry."

Republicans counter that they do not oppose spending money on the food stamp program, as long as the money is going to families that absolutely need it.

Agriculture Committee member Mike Conaway (R-Texas) said Thursday, "We are not talking about eliminating the SNAP program."

Instead, the purpose of the measure is to "limit the public assistance program to those who qualify and close loopholes that have allowed people to game the system." The changes will help "keep the safety net intact for qualified families," he said.

Republicans contend that reform of SNAP could help combat such fraud.

USDA Inspector General Phyllis Fong testified in March of last year before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform that there has been a significant increase in fraud and abuse of the food stamp program.

*FrontPage Magazine* [reported](#), "According to Fong, the USDA since 2007 has launched 779 probes that had [resulted](#) in 1,356 indictments, 944 convictions and 792 sanctions against individuals and businesses that had cheated the program out of more than \$200 million."

Rep. Andy Harris (R-MA) referenced that study in a statement he made on the House measure. "There's the one study that showed — by the Dept. of Agriculture — 10.5 percent of stores are committing



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fraud,” Harris told CNN’s Carroll Costello. “What we’re doing is we’re just saying, ‘Look, if we’re going to help you with food stamps — and we are — then we need you to either work, look for employment ... or engage in job training’.”

Of course, there is nothing in the Constitution that allows the federal government to play any part in feeding the poor. This is a responsibility of either states or individuals in states. Prior to the establishment of federal food stamps and welfare by the federal government, charitable efforts took care of the needy — and could again. As a big bonus, charitable efforts could virtually end fraud overnight and truly serve the needy.



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