

Food Stamp Cuts Are Proposed; House Plan Would Affect 300,000

The Washington Post

November 3, 2005 Thursday, Final Edition

Copyright 2005 The Washington Post



Section: A Section; A01

Length: 1067 words

Byline: Jonathan Weisman, Washington Post Staff Writer

Body

House Republicans are pushing to cut tens of thousands of legal immigrants off food stamps, partially reversing President Bush's efforts to win Latino votes by restoring similar cuts made in the 1990s.

The food stamp measure is just one of several provisions in an expansive congressional budget-cutting package that critics say unfairly targets the poor and disadvantaged, especially poor children.

The battle will be joined today when the **House** Budget Committee is scheduled to fold eight budget-cutting bills saving \$50 billion through 2010 into a single measure and then send it to the floor for a vote next week. The Senate is also set to vote on its version of the budget-cutting package, which would not cut food stamps. The smaller measure, with \$39 billion in savings, has broad reach, affecting Medicare, Medicaid, agriculture programs, private pension plans and energy.

The Senate action will feature a showdown over a bid to open Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling, as well as confrontations over limits to agriculture subsidies, Medicaid payments and Hurricane Katrina relief.

While concerns about runaway spending for the war and disaster relief have dominated the debate over the budget until now, lawmakers in both chambers have been quietly drafting changes to major spending and entitlement programs that would affect millions of Americans, including the fast-growing immigrant population.

The food stamp cuts in the **House** measure would knock nearly 300,000 people off nutritional assistance programs, including 70,000 legal immigrants, according to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office. Those immigrants would lose their benefits because the **House** measure would require legal immigrants to live in the United States for seven years before becoming eligible to receive food stamps, rather than the current five years.

About 40,000 children would lose eligibility for free or reduced-price school lunches, the CBO estimated.

The food stamp cuts, if approved, will especially affect 11 states, including Maryland, that used the changes in the food stamp law -- approved with Bush's support in 2002 -- to expand eligibility and to simplify the application process. Under the **House** measure, eligibility for food stamps would be tightened to exclude some recipients who qualify for nutritional support simply because they qualify for other anti-poverty programs funded by the federal welfare program, known as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

Food Stamp Cuts Are Proposed; House Plan Would Affect 300,000

Richard Larson, policy research director for the Maryland Department of Human Resources, said the state took advantage of the 2002 changes in the law to simplify the lives of Maryland's poor and to reduce the onerous paperwork involved in meeting the different qualifications for various anti-poverty programs. If a family qualifies for one program, such as Maryland's family-preservation services, it qualifies for **food stamps** automatically.

By eliminating such "categorical eligibility," the **House** measure would especially hurt those moving off of welfare, who may have incomes that exceed the basic **food stamp** threshold but who also have higher expenses, such as for child care and out-of-pocket health insurance, that come with work, Larson said.

White **House** officials have refused to disparage the **House proposal**, but they have made it clear that the savings from programs under the Agriculture Department can be achieved without **food stamp cuts**, as the Senate and the president have shown.

Such issues have created deep divisions between the conservatives pushing the **cuts** and Republican moderates, who fear the measure is going too far. A separate **House** measure would scale back federal administrative aid to state child-support enforcement programs, saving the federal government nearly \$5 billion over five years but potentially **cutting** child-support collections even more.

Still another **House** provision would roll back a court-ordered expansion of foster care support, denying foster care payments to relatives who take in children removed from their parents' homes by court order. That provision would reduce the coverage of foster care payments to about 4,000 children a month and **cut** \$397 million from the program through 2010, the CBO said.

"Why would we want to do anything to discourage a family member from taking in a child who has been abandoned or neglected by his birth family?" asked Rep. Heather A. Wilson (R-N.M.), who has told **House** leaders she cannot support the legislation.

House GOP leaders say the broad measure would root out government inefficiency and waste, while confronting the hard choices posed by the stubbornly high budget deficits and the costs of war and natural disasters. Even \$50 billion is just a 0.6 percent nick out of the \$7.8 trillion in federal entitlement spending expected over the next five years.

"We're **cutting**, but we're also changing things to try to make them fit today's needs better," **House** Speaker J. Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) said yesterday.

But some Republicans worry that social service **cuts**, though relatively small, might have outsized political ramifications, especially when Republicans move in the coming weeks to **cut** taxes for the fifth time in as many years. Those tax **cuts**, totaling \$70 billion over five years, would more than offset the deficit reduction that would result from the budget **cuts**.

"The problem is the interrelationship between **cutting** taxes, which no matter what you do will be viewed as **cutting** taxes for the rich, and reducing programs for the poor," said moderate Rep. Michael N. Castle (R-Del.). "It's that simple."

When Bush secured the restoration of **food stamps** for thousands of legal immigrants in the huge 2002 farm bill, he pointed to the provision as proof that the measure was a "compassionate bill."

At \$844 million over five years, the **House's proposed food stamp cuts** would account for less than half a percent of the total **food stamp** budget over that time. But Jennifer Ng'andu, a health and social policy analyst at the National Council of La Raza, highlighted the symbolism of the provision: It is the only item in the budget measure targeted at immigrants.

"Going back on this is a reversal of all the achievements Bush has made with immigrants," she said. "These are lawful residents, good enough to die for our country in Iraq but not good enough to get **food stamps**."

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Subject: WELFARE BENEFITS (90%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (90%); **FOOD STAMPS** (90%); **FOOD** ASSISTANCE (89%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (89%); INCOME ASSISTANCE (89%); LEGISLATION (89%); CHILDREN (89%); IMMIGRATION LAW (89%); MEDICAID (89%); US REPUBLICAN PARTY (78%); GOVERNMENT BUDGETS (78%); PUBLIC HEALTH & WELFARE LAW (78%); HISPANIC AMERICANS (78%); POVERTY & HOMELESSNESS (78%); SCHOOL MEAL PROGRAMS (78%); PUBLIC POLICY (77%); FAMILY SERVICES (76%); FAMILY (76%); CHILD POVERTY (76%); MEDICARE (73%); NATURAL DISASTERS (72%); DISASTER RELIEF (72%); HURRICANES (72%); WILDLIFE CONSERVATION (72%); HURRICANE KATRINA (72%); AGRICULTURAL SUBSIDIES (68%); PENSION & RETIREMENT **PLANS** (68%); WILDLIFE (68%); HUMAN RESOURCES (68%)

Industry: BUDGET **CUTS** (90%); BUDGETS (90%); MEDICAID (89%); GOVERNMENT BUDGETS (78%); MEDICARE (73%); AGRICULTURE (68%); AGRICULTURAL SUBSIDIES (68%); PENSION & RETIREMENT **PLANS** (68%)

Person: GEORGE W BUSH (58%)

Geographic: MARYLAND, USA (94%); ALASKA, USA (92%); UNITED STATES (92%); ARCTIC (56%)

Load-Date: November 3, 2005