
Statement of Robert Greenstein, President, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

House Wisely Rejects Farm Bill with Stunning, Extreme Provision to Pay States to Cut Families Off SNAP Because They Can't Find Jobs

The House wisely rejected a farm bill today that included an unprecedented provision, added earlier in the day, to reward governors with large sums of unrestricted cash if they remove families from the SNAP (food stamp) program because the parents, through no fault of their own, cannot find jobs.

As I explained in a blog [earlier today](#), this extreme provision would allow states to terminate benefits to households where adults — including parents with children as young as 1 year old and many people with disabilities — are not working or participating in a work or training program at least 20 hours a week. It would not require states to make any work opportunities available and would provide no jobs and no funds for work or training programs. Thus, people who want to work and are looking for a job but haven't found one could have their benefits cut off. Their children's benefits could be cut off, as well.

Why would a state do this? Because, under the measure, states would have a powerful financial incentive to pursue this route: it allows them to keep *half* of the savings from cutting people off SNAP, and to use the money for whatever state politicians want — tax cuts, special-interest subsidies, or anything else.

The provision, which came in an amendment from Rep. Steve Southerland (R-FL), is *not* a normal “work requirement.” Work requirements in low-income programs require people to look for jobs, to accept job offers, to participate in training programs if they get a slot in a program, and the like. *That's not what the Southerland amendment would do.* It would reward governors for cutting off people who haven't refused to meet any such requirement and whose only sin was that they could not find jobs and could not get a slot in a work or training program because their state didn't make one available. That's why this amendment is unprecedented and draconian.

I have been involved with SNAP — and with every bill addressing farm programs and food stamps — since 1973, including the years when the legendary right-wing conservative Senator Jesse Helms chaired the Senate Agriculture Committee and sought repeatedly to cut the program deeply. But, not even Senator Helms ever supported a measure as extreme as this one.

What's more, the Southerland amendment came on top of \$20.5 billion in SNAP cuts already in the bill, which would eliminate SNAP food assistance to nearly 2 million low-income people, mostly working families with children and senior citizens. The SNAP cuts, which would increase hardship and food insecurity, made up more than half of the savings in the farm bill.

No lawmaker with a conscience should vote for a farm bill that includes the Southerland provision. And if Congress sends the President a farm bill with such a provision, he should veto it on that basis alone, irrespective of what else is in the bill.

Some House leaders now say that the farm bill fell today because of members who oppose work requirements for SNAP recipients. The charge is patently false: the SNAP program already has work requirements and, as explained above, the Southerland amendment was an unjustifiable benefit cut-off for people who are willing to work, coupled with a bribe to states — *not* a work requirement in the normal sense.

Moreover, Democrats had warned House Republican leaders that including the Southerland measure would poison the farm bill and cause a number of Democrats who otherwise planned to vote for the bill to vote against it. House Republican leaders chose to push hard for the amendment nonetheless, with Majority Leader Eric Cantor helping lead the charge with a strong statement on the House floor. That decision, whether out of ideology or political cynicism and opportunism, helped seal the farm bill's fate today.

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