

GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

STATES SCRAMBLE TO SEND SNAP BENEFITS



STEPHANIE SCARBROUGH, ASSOCIATED PRESS

A person shops for produce Monday at a grocery store in Baltimore.

USDA: ‘Immediate steps’ needed to dole out November allotments

GEOFF MULVHILL AND DAVID A. LIEB
Associated Press

With the longest U.S. government shutdown over, state officials said Thursday they were working quickly to get full SNAP food benefits to millions of people who made do with little to no assistance for the past couple of weeks.

A back-and-forth series of court rulings and shifting policies from President Donald Trump’s administration led to a patchwork distribution of November benefits under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

While some states already issued full SNAP benefits, about two-thirds of states issued only partial benefits or none at all before the government shutdown ended late Wednesday.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, which runs the program, issued new guidance Thursday, instructing: “State agencies must take immediate steps to ensure households receive their full November allotments promptly.”

The federal food program serves about 42 million people, about 1 in 8 Americans, in lower-income households. They receive an average of about \$190 monthly

per person.

Because of the uncertainty over benefits, the USDA told states to exclude November from a federal requirement that most adult SNAP recipients work, volunteer or participate in job training for at least 80 hours a month. Under normal circumstances, recipients can only go three months in a span of three years without meeting the work requirements.

States shift to full speed

In some states where SNAP recipients received nothing during November, officials said they were working to load money on to people’s electronic benefit cards by Friday, if not sooner.

The Arkansas Department of Human Services said Thursday that full November SNAP benefits are expected to be available at midnight for people to buy groceries.

“This has been difficult for our beneficiaries, and we are incredibly appreciative to our partners across the state who helped bridge the gap through food pantries, donation drives, and other assistance efforts,” department Secretary Janet Mann said in a statement.

Officials in South Carolina and West Virginia, which also didn’t issue November benefits, said the full monthly amount should be available by Friday. Alabama said full SNAP benefits should be issued Thursday.

Colorado officials said they switched from delivering partial to full SNAP benefits, which could be loaded onto electronic cards starting Thursday.

The Illinois Department of Human Services, which previously issued partial November benefits, said Thursday it was “working to restore full SNAP benefits.” But it won’t happen instantly.

“We anticipate that the remaining benefit payments will be made over several days, starting tomorrow,” the department said in a statement, and that “all SNAP recipients will receive their full November benefits by November 20th.”

Paused payments stirred stress

The delayed SNAP payments posed another complication for Lee Harris’ family since his spouse was laid off a few months ago.

Please see SNAP, Page A2

State Dems say legislative majorities in reach in ’26

MITCHELL SCHMIDT AND KIMBERLY WETHAL
Wisconsin State Journal

MADISON — For the first time in more than a decade, Wisconsin Democrats are looking toward next year’s midterm election with their sights set on taking control of a state Legislature that’s been firmly controlled by Republicans since 2011.

Liberals are feeling especially bullish following Democratic victories earlier this month in Virginia and New Jersey — results the party paints as a direct referendum on President Donald Trump and the first 10 months of his second term. Wisconsin Democrats hope to replicate those successes in the 2026 midterms, which are just under a year away and include contested battles for governor, attorney general and a host of legislative seats.

In battleground Wisconsin, liberal optimism is particularly high in the state

Senate, where Republicans hold 18 seats to Democrats’ 15. With 17 Senate seats on the 2026 ballot — 12 held by Republicans and five held by Democrats — liberals only need to flip two districts and hold all their current seats to take control of the Legislature’s upper chamber.

Marquette Law School Lubar Center Research Fellow John Johnson said next year’s legislative races will be determined by a host of factors including the specific dynamics in those races, overall voter turnout, the quality of the candidates, whether incumbents seek re-election and what’s taking place at the federal level.

“That’s not just a copout because in the past I would have told you that none of those things mattered and Republicans were going to win a majority in both chambers,” Johnson said.

Republicans have held control of both

legislative chambers since 2011 thanks in large part to GOP-drawn maps first adopted in 2010 that were considered some of the most gerrymandered boundaries in the country.

But new, more Democratic-friendly legislative maps signed by Democratic Gov. Tony Evers in February 2024 have Wisconsin liberals feeling particularly bullish heading into the 2026 midterms, which could also spell challenges for Republicans who hold both chambers of Congress.

New district maps have already allowed Democrats to whittle away at Republicans’ majority in the Senate. In 2024, Democrats added four seats to their ranks and cost Republicans the supermajority they could use to override Evers’ vetoes. Democrats also flipped 10 seats in the Assembly that year, though Republicans still hold a nine-seat advantage in that chamber.

Senate

By looking at voter turnout in the state’s 2024 presidential and U.S. Senate race using existing legislative maps, as well as the April state Supreme Court race, Johnson identified four state Senate districts where Democratic candidates outperformed their GOP challengers.

Three of those districts, the 5th, 17th and 21st Senate Districts, are currently held by Republican Sens. Rob Hutton, R-Brookfield, Howard Marklein, R-Spring Green, and Van Wanggaard, R-Racine, respectively. The fourth, the 31st Senate District, is held by Sen. Jeff Smith, D-Brunswick.

Devin Remiker, chair of the Democratic Party of Wisconsin, said the party is targeting all three GOP-held seats as potential flip districts next year.

Please see LEGISLATIVE, Page A2