

USDA MUST FUND SNAP

Agency ordered to tap contingency reserves to provide food aid to 42 million people.

By Kevin Rector

Two federal judges told the U.S. Department of Agriculture in separate rulings Friday that it must begin using billions of dollars in contingency funding to provide federal food assistance to poor American families despite the federal shutdown, but gave the agency until Monday to decide how to do so.

Both Obama-appointed judges rejected Trump administration arguments that more than \$5 billion in USDA contingency funds could not legally be tapped to continue Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits for nearly 42 million people — about 1 in 8 Americans — while the federal government remains closed. But both also left unclear how exactly the relief should be provided, or when it will arrive for millions of families set to lose benefits starting Saturday.

The two rulings came almost simultaneously Friday.

In Massachusetts, U.S. District Judge Indira Talwani stopped short of granting California and a coalition of 24 other Democratic-led states a temporary restraining order they had requested. But she ruled that the states were likely to succeed in their arguments that the USDA's total shutoff of SNAP benefits — despite having billions in emergency contingency funds on hand — was unlawful.

Talwani gave USDA until Monday to tell her whether they would authorize “only reduced SNAP benefits” using the contingency funding — which would not cover the total \$8.5 billion to \$9 billion needed for all November benefits, according to the USDA — or would authorize “full SNAP benefits using [See Funds, A7]



CHRISTINA HOUSE Los Angeles Times



JULIANA YAMADA Los Angeles Times

DEMONSTRATORS speak out against the Trump administration at a rally in Long Beach, top. Above, volunteers phone bank for Proposition 50 in Los Angeles.

Prop. 50 looks likely to face a barrage of legal challenges

If the measure passes, state's GOP House representation would be trimmed by five.

By Jenny Jarvie

Six years ago, when the U.S. Supreme Court upheld highly partisan state election maps in North Carolina and Maryland — ruling that federal courts cannot block states from drawing up maps that favor one party over the other — one of the court's liberal justices issued a warning.

“If left unchecked, gerrymanders like the ones here may irreparably damage our system of government,” Associate Justice Elena Kagan wrote in a dissent.

Kagan argued that Republicans in North Carolina and Democrats in Maryland — the two examples before the court — had rigged elections in a way that “deprived citizens of the most fundamental of their constitutional rights,” “debased and dishonored our democracy” and turned “upside-down the core American idea that all governmental power derives from the people.”

“Ask yourself,” Kagan said as she recounted what had happened in each state: “Is this how American democracy is supposed to work?”

That's the question Californians are now weighing as they decide how, or whether, to vote on Proposition 50, Gov. Gavin Newsom's plan to scrap congressional maps drawn by the state's independent redistricting commission and replace them with maps drawn by legislators to favor Democrats through 2030.

Democrats don't deny that the measure is a deliberate attempt to dilute GOP voting power. From the start, they've argued that the point of re-

Obamacare premiums may soar in 2026

Without federal subsidies, Covered California plans are too pricey for many.

By Tyrone Beason

Californians renewing their public health plans or who plan to sign up for the first time will be in for sticker shock when open enrollment begins on Saturday. Monthly premiums for federally subsidized plans available on the Covered California exchange — often referred to as Obamacare — will soar by 97% on average for 2026.

The skyrocketing premiums come as a result of a conflict at the center of the current federal government shutdown, which began on Oct. 1: a budgetary impasse between the Republican majority and Democrats over whether to preserve enhanced, Biden-era tax credits that expanded health-care eligibility to millions more Americans and kept monthly insurance costs affordable for existing policy-

holders. About 1.7 million of the 1.9 million Californians currently on a Covered California plan benefit from the tax credits.

Open enrollment for the coming year runs from Nov. 1 until Jan. 31. It's traditionally the period when members compare options and make changes to existing plans and when new members opt in.

Only this time, the government shutdown has stirred uncertainty about the fate of the subsidies, first introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic and which have been keeping policy costs low, but will expire at the end of the year if lawmakers in Washington don't act to extend them.

Californians window shopping on the exchange's consumer homepage will have to make some tough decisions, said Covered California Executive Director Jessica Altman. The loss of the tax credits to subsidize premiums only adds to what can already be a complicated, time-consuming and frustrating process.

Even if the subsidies re- [See Premiums, A8]

Covered California costs could double if the Enhanced Premium Tax Credit expires

2026 monthly net premium

■ With EPTC ■ Without

Statewide
97% increase
\$130
\$255

Los Angeles County
73% increase
\$129
\$223

Subsidized enrollees making...

Less than \$63,000
88% increase
\$97
\$182

More than \$63,000
114% increase
\$440
\$942

Covered California

HANNA SENDER Los Angeles Times

ANALYSIS

Trump's new gunboat diplomacy in Latin America



AL DRAGO Washington Post

PRESIDENT TRUMP has supported Latin American allies like Nayib Bukele, El Salvador's president.

His mix of handshakes and hostility appears aimed at bending countries to his will.

By Patrick J. McDonnell and Kate Linticum

MEXICO CITY — They're blowing up boats in the high seas, threatening tariffs from Brazil to Mexico and punishing anyone deemed hostile — while lavishing aid and praise on allies all aboard with the White House program.

Welcome to the Monroe Doctrine 2.0, the Trump administration's bellicose, you're-with-us-or-against-us approach to Latin America.

Not yet a year into his term, President Trump seems intent on putting his footprint in "America's backyard" more than any recent predecessor. He came to office threatening to take back the Panama Canal, and now seems poised to launch a military attack on Venezuela and perhaps even drone strikes on cartel targets in Mexico. He vowed to withhold aid from Argentina if this week's legislative elec-

tions didn't go the way he wanted. They did.

“Every president comes in promising a new focus on Latin America, but the Trump administration is actually doing it,” said James Bosworth, whose firm provides regional risk analysis. “There is no country in the region that is not questioning how the U.S. is playing Latin America right now.”

Fearing a return to an era when U.S. intervention was the norm — from outright invasions to covert CIA operations to economic meddling — many Latin American leaders are trying to craft [See Trump, A4]

More join DIY fire brigade's battle

By Noah Haggerty

When a column of smoke rose above Pacific Palisades on Jan. 7, a couple dozen residents of the Santa Monica Mountains, instead of evacuating, jumped into their own fire engines. The Community Brigade raced door-to-door ordering residents to evacuate, stamped out spot fires and transported animals (including koi fish) to safety.

As the fire garnered national attention, Keegan Gibbs, the brigade's director of operations, found himself talking to CNN, Vogue and the New York Times. Locals, galvanized by the events of January, began signing up in droves. The team of about 50 received hundreds of requests to join.

Starting Saturday, the brigade, which has operated formally under the supervision of the Los Angeles County Fire Department since 2023, will begin training roughly 50 new recruits in a classroom they've co-opted at Pepperdine University — essentially doubling the brigade's size. They hope to double it again next [See Brigade, A8]

From Cup Noodles to protein power

By Caroline Petrow-Cohen

Nissin Foods, the Japanese giant that brought the world instant ramen, is testing a new kind of noodle in Los Angeles.

It's now making protein-fortified pastas for Angelinos who want more bang for their bowls.

Nissin invented Cup Noodles, a go-to meal for people across the globe and a favorite among those on a budget. More than 100 billion portions of instant noodles from hundreds of companies are

consumed every year.

In the U.S., much of Nissin's expansion came from its sprawling factory in Gardena, where it started producing noodle packets in the 1970s. By 1973, the company launched Cup Noodles, an innovation aimed at Americans who liked to drink soup from cups.

The latest American preference Nissin has noticed is a surging demand for protein among mainstream consumers. It is popping up in snack foods, espresso drinks and breakfast cereals. Even Pop-Tarts and Doritos have released

products with extra protein.

Nissin launched a new noodle company to capitalize on the trend this year. The company, Kanzen Meal, which now has around 10 employees, recently began serving up nutrient-dense meals from the frozen foods aisle. Its products are available in dozens of grocery stores across Southern California.

“There's an interest in nutrient density and people want more bang for their buck out of the foods that they eat,” Kanzen Meal chief executive Bob Little said. “We think that there's an op- [See Nissin, A14]

Dodgers try to stave off the end of their season

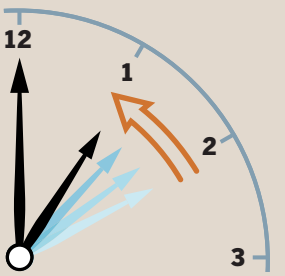
For coverage of Game 6 of the World Series, visit latimes.com/enewspaper and latimes.com/dodgers. **SPORTS, B12**

Disney channels exit YouTube TV

Millions of customers are blocked from ESPN, ABC and more after a breakdown in contract talks. **BUSINESS, A10**

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Timely reminder
Daylight saving time ends Sunday at 2 a.m.

Weather
Mostly sunny.
L.A. Basin: 80/57. **B8**

