

Nevadans relying on food stamps more as jobs disappear

By Nevada News Bureau

Nevada experienced the greatest growth among the states in food stamp caseloads between 2007 and 2010 with an increase of 128 percent, according to a recent report from the Urban Institute.

The jump in caseloads is attributable to a nearly 250 percent increase in state unemployment between 2007 and 2010, the report says.

The Unemployment and Recovery Project report said caseload increases across the country are a reflection of high unemployment, as well as increased participation rates and program changes that make it easier for families to get benefits.

Nearly 45 million people currently receive help from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly called food stamps), an increase of about 69 percent since the recession began near the end of 2007.

A recent report said 329,105 Nevadans received assistance from SNAP in March, citing statistics obtained from the state Division of Welfare and Supportive Services.

Today, SNAP reaches about one in seven Americans.

* Over half of SNAP-supported households include children, and one in five include a disabled, non-elderly adult.

* About one in eight SNAP-supported households include elderly individuals.

* 96 percent are U.S. citizens, 1 percent are refugees, and 3

percent are documented non-citizens living in the U.S. long enough to qualify (aliens are not eligible for SNAP benefits).

* In 2009, about 29 percent of SNAP households had some earnings, 5 percent had some unemployment insurance, and many others reported disability or retirement income. Nearly one in five (18 percent) had no countable income.

The current debate over reducing the federal deficit has led some to propose scaling back federal program costs. The House Budget Committee passed a major restructuring that would block grant SNAP to the states with fixed federal resources.

House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan's budget plan would cut the SNAP program by \$127 billion – almost 20 percent – over the next 10 years (2012-21).

In addition to possible cuts to SNAP, thousands of Nevada residents who rely on financial assistance to pay their power bills likely won't get help this year because of federal funding cuts.

The Division of Welfare and Supportive Services recently said federal funding for Nevada's Energy Assistance Program will amount to only \$4 million this year, down from \$15.8 million in the fiscal year that just ended June 30.