

ARIZONA

Trickle Down Times

Stamped Out Over Food Stamps?

Timeliness is the single most important facet of a food stamp application evaluation. Hungry people with no food have been designated the number one priority for evaluation and assignment of benefits by the federal government. This is so important that the Feds will postpone verification of qualification factors to get people the food they need. The Feds would rather mistakenly give food to the undeserving than see hungry mouths go unfed. I would say that is cut and dry.

Accuracy in evaluating food stamp applications is also a very important factor for reasons so obvious I will not state them here, the value of accurate accounting methods is common knowledge.

To increase both these areas of food stamp application processing, the federal government does two things. For poor performance, they sanction culprits. And for marked improvement or for being at the top of the countries high performance state agencies, the feds will give performance rewards or bonus monies. Good or bad can equal millions. Good or bad can also stack up. This is a yearly process. This is defined in the two federal documents listed below.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Food and Nutrition Service
7 CFR Parts 272 and 275
RIN 0584-AD29
Food Stamp Program: High Performance Bonuses
AGENCY: Food and Nutrition Service, USDA.
ACTION: Final rule.

Getting Food Stamps to Hungry Families on Time: Federal Rules and the High Performance Bonus for Timeliness
September 2005
Food Research and Action Center
1875 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 540
Washington, DC 20009
(202) 986-2200
<http://www.frac.org>

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 8:21 AM
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Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:56 AM
Comment: The AP Style Guide suggests lowercasing "federal government"

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Let's now look at our state and gauge the behind-the-scenes action, just to know where we Arizonans stand..... We will learn where we are in our stand against hunger, how the situation was being handled, would it have worked and why..... We will also examine how the current situation reflects upon and reveals what may motivate our new governor's policies, indeed how she thinks about Arizona's people and their hunger issues.

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 10:02 AM
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Where We Are and How We Stand

The next stop on our fact-finding journey is *Former Governor Janet Napolitano's **Balanced Budget Proposal for 2009 and 2010***, available in PDF format at www.az211.org. It makes for rather dismal reading. One important point is that **we are not at the bottom of this recession. It's going to get worse.** I have not heard anyone argue seriously against this, so let's move on.

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 10:03 AM
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Justin Buehler 2/20/09 3:29 PM
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The next important point is that the **Arizona Dept of Economic Security (DES)**, the agency charged with the well-being of Arizonans, nutritionally, medically, financially, etc, is going to have a **\$41 million budget shortfall**.

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:33 AM
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Justin Buehler 2/20/09 8:53 AM
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This is very bad for the hungry people of our state. DES has a department called Family Assistance Administration: they have a group called the Division of Benefits and Medical Eligibility. These dedicated, competent, and completely overloaded folks make the determinations as far as food stamp eligibility (and medical assistance eligibility, but we shall prioritize and stick to the food stamp topic, you don't need a Dr. to save you from starvation.....).

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 8:58 AM
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Bad economy= more job losses = higher unemployment rates = more food stamp applications

Obvious? Yes.

Now things get messy. With the fixed number of *Program Service Evaluators (PSEs)* handling an application rate that is spiraling out of control, timeliness and accuracy will suffer..... Federal sanctions could be on the horizon. I would bet on sanctions.....

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:01 AM
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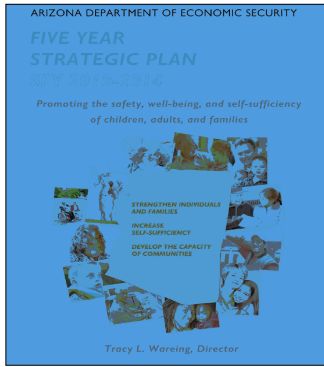
Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:03 AM
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That's where Governor Napolitano had a plan. She had an incredibly competent individual working to save Arizonans from the dismal future looming ahead. Her name, **Tracy Wareing**, and until a few weeks ago she was the director of DES. She had a plan, published for all to see, freely available online at the DES Web site, www.AZDES.gov.

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:04 AM
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There are probably a few copies lying around the governor's office.....

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:05 AM
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It's a sound plan. I'm sure, with no preference to either political party just a thoughtful consideration of the needs of Arizonans.

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:05 AM
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Then Director Wareing also published a DES annual report, which has information relevant to our fact-finding adventure. The most interesting fact is that Arizona is entitled to receive a high-performance bonus for efficiency in case evaluations. Congratulations Arizona. Things could be looking up a little.....

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:08 AM
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One of the things Wareing did to keep Arizonans safe—and to keep this well-oiled machine rolling—was to hire 250 new PSEs. Some might note that the state government had been under a hiring freeze, but an exception was given to agencies involving health, safety and the well-being of Arizona's people. The PSE's position is logically exempted, as are police and emergency support services, and others.

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:12 AM
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The PSE personell were hired, all was good. Training was arranged.

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:17 AM
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WE WERE PREPARED FOR THE WORST and EQUIPPED WITH THE BEST.

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:18 AM
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Unfortunately, this was not to be. Governor Napolitano was appointed chief of homeland security, and soon thereafter Tracy Wareing stepped down.

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:22 AM
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In comes the new governor, with a decidedly different party affiliation. A new director of DES is appointed. Everyone is assured it will be a smooth transition. The script seemed to read: "Don't expect any thing too radical, things will get back to normal soon." But it was not intended to be. Within a few weeks, large numbers of new PSE employess were dismissed—an atmosphere of fear and dread, or fear and loathing, settled over the local offices and training facilities. People were called out of classes never to be

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:23 AM
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heard from again. (Dramatic? Yes. Exaggerated? NO!) It was said that these people knew what they had done wrong.

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:27 AM
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A brightly smiling, profusely perspiring woman (folks do that when they are reassuring people, right?) from the HR department made the rounds, assuring people that there was nothing to fear. There was no witch-hunt... blah, blah, blah.

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:29 AM
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I was sent from training and fired the next morning. (Its not really important yet, but I had a 100 percent test score average in my PACT, 1 & 2 tests. My lowest score on a self-paced CBT was a solitary, uncharacteristic 83; the rest were mid-90 and 100 respectively.)

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:31 AM
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Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:33 AM
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If that was not bad enough, the next week the training sessions were suspended and all students were sent back to their local offices, unqualified to do the jobs they were hired to do, many of whom were scared they'd share my fate.

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:33 AM
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Before I get ahead of myself, let me run some numbers by you.

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To review

DES has a \$41 million budget shortfall.

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:31 AM
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250 new PSEs at \$25k /year = approx \$6.25 million

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:33 AM
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Doesn't sound unreasonable to give 'em the axe and save money.....

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:34 AM
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WRONG.

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:34 AM
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Money had already been spent on training, both in the office (OJT) and intensive classroom sessions. All new hires were already proving themselves dedicated, indispensable members of their local offices. The future was bright. The prognosis was good...

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Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:35 AM
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Six million is also a magical number when it comes to bonuses, sanctions, etc. We already had a bonus coming that paid these employee's salaries for a year. Increasing efficiency and timeliness would have led to more bonuses, less sanctioning.

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:35 AM
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Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:36 AM
Comment: What does "OJT" stand for? What is it? Hope this helps.

Now our new governor, in all her Partisan wisdom, has made the decision to undo every good thing her opposing party predecessors did. Change for the sake of change.

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:36 AM
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That's not the best part. To cover this up, a story about the legislature cutting AHCCCS funding for organ transplant operations was leaked to the press. Oh no, that was a mistake, the spokesman on TV said,

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Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:39 AM
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Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:41 AM
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Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:42 AM
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Of course it is. AHCCCS is mostly FEDERAL money. Take away benefits the feds want in place and see what happens next. Arizona cannot choose to not pay for transplant surgeries. It's not their decision. What else have we missed?

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:43 AM
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Like being lied to? I don't.
If you recently lost your job, how does it feel to be told that **your hunger is not important?**

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:45 AM
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Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:44 AM
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How does it feel to have someone at the helm that does not care a bit how the unfortunate fare in Arizona? **Did the new Governor attend the Superbowl? Who paid for that? How many salaries could that ticket have paid?**

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Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:45 AM
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It's a good thing I do not work for the state any longer, I could get in serious trouble for letting the cat out of the bag about this governor, who no one voted for. She has actually caused more losses than savings in her hasty, misinformed plan-of-action.

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:45 AM
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trouble for...G... noone ...ever ...
misinformed plan... [28]

Here are some other things to consider: When timeliness suffers, and it will—what's going to happen? I wager it'll be federal sanctions on the subsidies for DES's operational budget—the feds, in their wisdom, won't take benefit funding away from the hungry, but guess who will try to.

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:47 AM
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Oh, our governor and new director's other money saving tip? Turn the lights out when you leave at night.

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:53 AM
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And like Columbo used to say as he finished an interview, "Oh, and just one more thing sir, if you will..."

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:53 AM
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The Governor will deny making these decisions, no doubt, but here in America we hold those at the top accountable for those they appoint under them. Have a nice Day governor.

Justin Buehler 2/20/09 9:54 AM
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Let's all keep an eye open for frivolous government spending.