

# ARIZONA

Trickle Down Times

## Stamped Out Over Food Stamps?

**Timliness** 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

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**Lets** 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.

## **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](http://www.az211.org). It makes for rather dismal reading. One important point is that **we are not at the worst this recession has to offer. It is going to get worse.** I have not heard anyone argue seriously against this , so we shall move on.

The next important point is that the **Arizona Dept of Economic Security**, the agency charged with the well being of Arizonans, nutritionally, medically, financially etc, is going to have a **\$41 million budget short fall.**

This is very bad for the hungry people of our state. DES has a department called the 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.....).

**Bad economy= more job losses = higher unemployment rates = more food stamp applications**

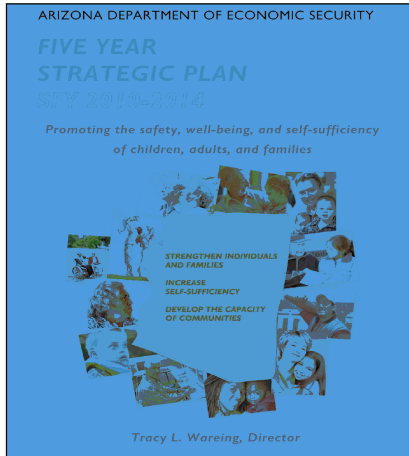
*Obvious yes.?*

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

I would bet on sanctions.....

That's where Gov 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 website , [www.AZDES.gov](http://www.AZDES.gov).

There are probably a few copies lying around the Governor's office.....



It is a sound plan , with I am sure no preference to either political party .....just thoughtful consideration of the needs of Arizonans.

Director Wareing also published the DES annual report, it also has information relevant to our fact finding adventure. The most interesting fact is that Arizona is to receive a high performance bonus for efficiency in Case evaluations. Congratulations Arizona. Things could be looking up a little.....



**One** of the things Director Tracy Wareing did to keep Arizonans safe and to keep this well oiled machine rolling was to hire 250 new Program Service Evaluators. Some might note that the State Gov had been under a hiring freeze, there was an exception for positions vital to the health, safety and well being of Arizona's people . The PSE position is logically exempted as are police and emergency support services etc.

Annual Report  
State Fiscal Year 2008

Janet Napolitano, Governor  
Tracy L. Wareing, Director

The PSE personell were hired, all was good, training was arranged.

## **WE WERE PREPARED FOR THE WORST and EQUIPED WITH THE BEST.**

**Unfortunately** this was not to be. Gov Napolitano was appointed Chief of Homeland Security and soon thereafter Tracy Wareing Stepped down.

In comes **new Governor**, with a decidedly **different party** affiliation. A **new Director** of DES is appointed. Everyone is assured it will be a smooth transition, 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 dread and fear, or fear and loathing settled over the local offices and the training facilities. People were called out of classes never to be heard from again. (dramatic, yes, exaggerated? NO). It was said these people knew what they had done wrong.

A brightly smiling, profusely perspiring woman (folks do that when they are reassuring people, right?) from the HR dept made the rounds assuring people that there was nothing to fear. There was no witch hunt....blah blah blah. 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 a 100)

If that was not bad enough, the next week the training sessions were suspended and all student were sent back to their local offices. Unqualified to do the jobs they were hired to do, and many scared they would share my fate.

Before I get ahead of myself let me run some numbers by.

## **To review,**

DES has \$41 million budget shortfall.

250 new PSE1 at \$25k /year = approx \$6.25 million

Does'nt sound unreasonable to give em the axe and save the money.....

## **.WRONG.**

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 office crews. The future was bright, the prognosis was good.....

Six million is also a magical number when it comes to Bonuses, Sanctions etc. We already had a bonus coming that paid these peoples salaries for a year. Increasing efficiency and timliness would have led to more bonuses, less sanctioning.

Until a Governor who came into office, in all her Partisan wisdom made the decision to undo every good thing her opposing party predecessors did. **Change for the sake of change.**

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 said on tv.

Of course it was. 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?

**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.**

How does it feel to have someone at the helm who 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?**

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 no one ever voted for. She has actually caused more losses than savings in her hasty, misinformed plan of action.

Here is the real nice feature, when timeliness suffers, and it will, what's gonna happen? Federal Sanctions of the Federal subsidies to DES operational budgeting. The Feds, in their wisdom, won't take benefit funding away from the hungry. But guess who will try to?

**Oh, our Governor and new Directors other money saving tip? Turn the lights out when you leave at night.**

**And like Columbo used to say as he finished an interview, oh and just one more thing sir, if you will.....**

**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.**

**Lets all keep an eye open for frivolous government spending.**