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POLS 155, Sect. 25

Prof. Sanchez

### Town Hall Meeting Assignment #2

#### **Policy Problem:**

While some states diligently enroll eligible citizens in SNAP, the food stamps program, California enrolls a very low percentage of qualified applicants. The state of Tennessee boasts a 92% enrollment rate. CalFresh, SNAP as it is called in California, achieves less than half (Halper 2013). The root of this problem is that outdated systems and software used by California process data inefficiently. In addition, different counties within California use different software which are often incompatible. As a result, offices are unable to properly process applications.

California's inability to adequately process applications translates to chaos to Californians seeking to receive aid. Some are being denied access to the program altogether while others are given insufficient aid. And still, fraudulent accounts fall through the cracks, and California pays the price of \$70 million a year (Branan 2013). The USDA reported that it provided California with information on over three thousand suspected cases of fraudulent food stamp accounts (Branan 2013). However, California has not followed up and given specific details of investigation.

#### **Policy Solution:**

Software systems should be updated in California in order to create effective data gathering. Successful data gathering by the new software would increase the efficiency of the program, which could effectively be administered by fewer CalFresh employees. The new software should be standard in every county so that investigators and CalFresh employees could

look up records from anywhere in the state. While it would initially be costly for the state to purchase a new software for the entire state and to retrain employees, investigators could finally begin to process the leads received from the USDA, and solid conclusions could be drawn in these cases. Fraudulent accounts could then be efficiently identified. By eliminating those taking advantage of CalFresh's inefficiency, the state would minimize the cost that make politicians in Washington wary of the program. This new software system could be used to effectively process applications and determine eligibility for SNAP by providing a concise report to any CalFresh administrator.

**Interest Groups:**

First Focus Campaign for Children (<http://www.ffcampaignforchildren.org/>) – First Focus advocates on behalf of children and their families to ensure they receive the social services they need. They would be for this policy change because its goal is to process applications efficiently, increasing the capacity for the state to provide adequate aid to qualifying families. They argue that since children did not create the problems of these social programs, they should not be adversely affected by the social programs (Nixon 2013).

Heritage Foundation (<http://www.heritage.org/>) – Heritage's mission is to promote conservative public policy based on a number of principles, notably limited government. This organization would be against this policy solution because they advocate stricter enrollment requirements in order to keep enrollment low (Halper 2013). This solution seeks to improve CalFresh's efficiency and increase enrollment percentage.

**Arguments For:**

The USDA is responsible for providing leads for fraudulent accounts to state governments. State governments then follow up and investigate the accounts. The USDA says

that the “misuse of food stamps undermines the credibility of an important social program that feeds 4 million residents in California alone” (Branan 2013). By allowing misuse of CalFresh to continue, our representatives in Washington have the evidence to argue that continued spending for SNAP is irresponsible. By implementing this new system, California can show Washington that money allotted for CalFresh will indeed make it to those in need making a case for the program’s value

When Republicans attempted to pass a farm bill separate from the food stamps bill, Representative Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut said “A vote for this bill is a vote to end nutrition in America” (Nixon, Weisman 2013). Reductions have also been called “cruel” by Rep. Grace Meng (Mascaro 2013). While these are simplified statements, the point is that cutting SNAP would do more harm than good. By executing the new system, California can cut the costs of fraudulent accounts, which would mean Washington would not need to cut SNAP funds.

#### **Arguments Against:**

An argument presented by a member of the Heritage Foundation is that Food Stamps has become out of control, and needs to be better monitored (Stolberg 2013). The GOP is notable for this and is pushing through a bill that would cut spending for SNAP. However with the new system, “moochers” and other fraudulent cases would be found and caught. Spending would decrease substantially if the government could control this issue.

Another argument is cited by Representative Stephen Fincher. He quotes the Bible: “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat” (Stolberg 2013). Again, with the new system, CalFresh workers would be able to process applications properly and they would be able to determine if applicants are actually “unwilling.” In most cases, applicants are unable to provide

for themselves and their families, so they turn to the government. The new system would identify those actually who have the means to provide for themselves and bar them from the program.

**Course Concept Analysis:**

The First Focus Campaign for Children is an interest group committed to fighting on behalf of children and legislation that affects children. For example, they support policies that provide government aid to low income families. These policies are examples of the concept **social welfare policies** which are programs that provide for the needs of those who cannot, or sometime will not, provide for themselves” (Barbour and Wright 2012, 645). However, children are not able to provide for themselves which is why this group represents their interests.

The Heritage Foundation is an example of a **socially conservative** interest group because they endorse limited government control of the economy while encouraging government intervention to achieve a traditional social order (Barbour and Wright 2012, 55). The Heritage Foundation urges states to heighten enrollment requirements, especially in states where SNAP participation is high (Halper 2013). They also advocate for limiting government involvement in the economy, which means they would be against developing CalFresh, a government program that affects the economy by encouraging spending by distributing money.

## References

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