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Trump Administration Taps Tariff Revenue to Sustain WIC Program Amid Ongoing Shutdown

With Congress deadlocked, the White House will redirect part of the \$215 billion raised from Section 232 tariffs to sustain WIC, the \$7.6 billion program serving nearly 7 million women and children. Officials call the move vital as the shutdown drags on.

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As the federal government shutdown stretches into its second week, the Trump administration announced on Tuesday a plan to redirect revenue from Section 232 tariffs to maintain funding for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, known as WIC.

The program, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, supports nearly 7 million low-income pregnant women, new mothers, and young children with nutritious food, breastfeeding

assistance, and health referrals.

Without this intervention, WIC's funds—depleted from the prior fiscal year—were projected to lapse within days, according to the White House Office of Management and Budget. The move comes as Congress remains deadlocked on a spending bill for fiscal year 2026, which began October 1, leaving essential services in limbo.

The announcement followed warnings from administration officials that WIC's \$7.6 billion allocation from fiscal year 2025, which ended September 30, would not suffice without congressional action. White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt detailed the funding shift in a statement on social media, attributing the program's vulnerability to partisan gridlock. "The Democrats are so cruel in their continual votes to shut down the government that they forced the WIC program for the most vulnerable women and children to run out this week," Leavitt wrote. "Thankfully, President Trump and the White House have identified a creative solution to transfer resources from Section 232 tariff revenue to this critical program."

Section 232 tariffs, imposed on steel and aluminum imports for national security reasons, generated \$215 billion in fiscal year 2025, per Treasury Department figures, providing a reservoir for the temporary infusion.

WIC's structure as a capped entitlement program sets it apart from uncapped initiatives like SNAP, meaning its funding requires precise annual appropriations to cover all eligible participants. The National WIC Association, a nonprofit advocating for the program, welcomed the administration's step as a safeguard during the shutdown but urged Congress to approve full-year funding promptly. "Every day, WIC provides essential services to nearly 7 million mothers, pregnant women, and young children," the association stated in a release, emphasizing the program's role in supporting nearly half of U.S. infants. States like Connecticut have pledged to cover shortfalls if needed, with Gov. Ned Lamont assuring families that benefits would persist. Yet, the contingency relies on federal replenishment to avoid broader disruptions.

The tariff revenue transfer represents an unusual executive maneuver, as such funds are typically earmarked for defense or trade enforcement under the Trade Expansion Act of 1962. Legal experts note that while the administration can propose reallocations, designating tariff proceeds for specific domestic uses may require congressional concurrence to comply with appropriations laws. The White House has not yet disclosed the exact amount to be transferred or a timeline for implementation, prompting questions from lawmakers on both sides. House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Republican, praised the initiative as evidence of the administration's commitment to vulnerable populations.

This development underscores the human stakes of the fiscal impasse, which has furloughed hundreds of thousands of federal workers and halted non-essential services. WIC, operational since 1975, has demonstrated bipartisan backing through decades of expansions, yielding long-term benefits like reduced healthcare costs and improved child development outcomes, according to USDA evaluations. Advocates warn that even brief lapses could deter participation and strain local clinics, which administer the program through grants. The Trump administration's approach highlights tariff policy's spillover into social welfare, a tactic that echoes past uses of trade revenues for farmer aid during earlier tariff disputes.

With no resolution in sight, the WIC funding bridge buys time but amplifies calls for negotiation. Republican leaders have tied the shutdown to Democratic resistance on spending cuts, while Democrats counter that GOP demands for reductions in non-defense programs are the true barrier.

