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### Carbajal invites county Foodbank CEO as guest for State of the Union

By MITCHELL WHITE, NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER  
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Rep. Salud Carbajal, D-Santa Barbara, has announced that Erik Talkin, CEO of Foodbank of Santa Barbara County, will attend Tuesday's State of the Union address as his guest.

During the recent government shutdown, the foodbank distributed more than 21,296 pounds of food to 458 families of unpaid and furloughed federal workers on the Central Coast. Food was provided to nearly 1,500 individuals, including staff members at the Lompoc Federal Correctional Complex, as well as NASA employees who live in Vandenberg Village.

"As a recent addition to the House Agriculture Committee, I want to join Erik in sending the President a strong message: we will not allow yet another roadblock to be placed in front of struggling families who are working hard to get back on their feet," Mr. Carbajal said in a statement.

Mr. Talkin told the News-Press he was at one of the foodbank distribution centers for federal employees a few days ago in Lompoc when he received the invitation and was pleased to have the foodbank be recognized for its efforts. Having attended various conferences in the nation's capital, he is looking forward to being there in person to hear the address by President Donald Trump.

"I think it's a chance to hear things as they occur, rather than filtered through anyone else's point of view of what's happening," he said. "It's a chance to be there and a chance to speak to a lot of politicians of all stripes and really talk to them a little bit about hunger. Hopefully it's an issue that unites all sides and something that everyone agrees on at a basic level."

The local foodbank is part of Feeding America, a national network of foodbanks. Mr. Talkin said he intends to reach out to the network and various others to talk about nutritional needs.

"I think we're all relieved," he said, when asked about the reopening of the government. "It really was an indication that the foodbank is there for everyone in the community whenever it's needed."

Even with the government reopened there are still needs to be met. Some federal employees still need to pay bills or medical expenses and have yet to receive back pay. The foodbank will continue to serve the employees into next week, Mr. Talkin said.

If another government shutdown were to occur, the big challenge wouldn't necessarily be the federal workers but rather any interruptions to the CalFresh program. During the shutdown the program gave out benefits early and officials were confident that the February benefits would be delivered.

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Erik Talkin, CEO of Foodbank of Santa Barbara County, leaves for Washington, D.C., today to attend President Donald Trump's State of the Union address. NIK BLASKOVICH/NEWS-PRESS

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"If the shutdown had gone on for a more prolonged period, food stamps would have stopped going out around mid-February so that would suddenly create many thousands of people who need help from us," Mr. Talkin said. "Studies have shown that if you're on food stamps you've spent all your money by week three, so there would have been a deficit toward the end of February where we would have had to step in."

In any given year, the Foodbank of Santa Barbara County distributes 10 million pounds of food and, along with 300 community and nonprofit partners, serves one in four residents of the county, 40 percent of whom are children.

The foodbank also assists in disaster relief. Last year with the Thomas Fire and debris flow in Montecito, the foodbank fed many people who don't typically receive its services.

"The government workers thing was just another example of where we're feeding people that we're not usually feeding and the people themselves weren't expecting to need our service," Mr. Talkin said. "Food is the most core basic service so you need to make sure that is available to everyone."

Mr. Talkin will depart today and return on Wednesday. He told the News-Press he had no hesitation in accepting the invitation and hopes to use the platform to teach others about the foodbank system.

Earlier this week, Mr. Talkin began his fifth "Food Security Challenge," during which he time he spends \$194 per month, or \$6.46 per day on food — the maximum amount offered through the CalFresh program.

"It's a chance for me, because it's my job, to remind myself of a situation that a lot of people face and through the publicity to bring it to people's attention that this is a significant issue," Mr. Talkin said.

He uses the challenge to push what the foodbank calls food literacy, or the skills on how to plan meals, budget money and make the most out of the resources they have.

"The more that we give people these skills then they can get over times of having a lot of money for food and not much money for food," Mr. Talkin explained.

Mr. Talkin will keep a blog throughout the challenge, which can be found at [foodsecuritychallenge.com](http://foodsecuritychallenge.com).

To learn more about Foodbank of Santa Barbara County, visit [www.foodbanksbc.org](http://www.foodbanksbc.org).  
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