

TORNADOES, AUSTERITY, AND FOOD STAMPS

In one of my posts on drones, I noted that we have had more deaths this year in AL (238) and MO (159) because of extreme tornadoes the severity of which is probably at least due partly to climate change than we have from terrorism.

But there's something else that seems to have happened.

Meteor Blades has a post cataloging how many more people are relying on food stamps this month—45.8 million, or close to 15% of the country. He links to the state-level data, which reveals a huge spike in AL's use of food stamps. In April 2011, 868,813 Alabamans used food stamps—a worse than average but not abysmal 18% of its population. In May, that number spiked to 1,762,481, over 37% of the population, almost 900,000 new people getting food stamps.

Incidentally, the only people from AL's congressional delegation to vote no on the debt ceiling vote this week—Martha Robey, Mo Brooks, Richard Shelby, and Jeff Sessions—did so from the right.

Assuming these numbers are right (the numbers reported for new applicants—100,000 from hard-hit Jefferson County—seem to support them), there's still a good reason why so many Alabamans are relying on federal aid to feed themselves: the devastating tornadoes in April. In response, the state rolled out special sign-up processes, turning around applications in three days time. Though, at least from some quarters, there was skepticism about whether people were applying because of the tornado, or more generalized need.

At the very least, the reliance of over a third of Alabamans on food stamps, half of them in

response to the tornadoes, suggests one more cost from this crazy weather.

But it will be interesting to see what happens to these numbers in subsequent months. Will these numbers return to "normal," reflecting an appropriate and short term response to a disaster (even if it is one Alabama's legislators all refuse to pay for)? Or are we seeing a poor state come to rely on the government for bare necessities once it becomes easy to apply?