

The Common Good—COVID 19 and the Trump Budget

By Bill Whitaker (4-2-20)

Between 100,000 and 240,000 Americans will die from COVID-19 unless there is an immediate nationwide stay home/stay healthy/save lives order. More than 10 million Americans have lost their jobs. As much as 32% of the American labor force is likely to become unemployed, eclipsing 25% unemployment during the Great Depression.

In response, Congress passed a \$2 trillion relief package that meets some, but not all, of our immediate need. Bernie Sanders and other Democrats are asking for additional legislation. Congress, they contend, must work quickly to pass a new stimulus bill ensuring that every working family in our country is made whole, that ends the anxiety people are experiencing wondering how they're going to pay their rent and utility bills, put food on their tables and access needed healthcare without unaffordable out-of-pocket expense. Republicans appear reluctant to consider additional relief.

As the COVID-19 crisis persists, Congress will need to pass a budget for FY2021 (October 1, 2020 to September 30, 2021). Budgets are important. They represent our values. The way we spend our money shows what we care about. We need a budget that supports the common good.

President Trump's proposed FY2021 budget hurts healthcare, hurts rural communities and small farmers and ranchers, and increases hunger and malnutrition nationwide. Although Trump's budget is unlikely to pass while there is a Democratic majority in the House of Representatives, it's worth close attention in an election year. If Trump is reelected, Republicans keep control of the Senate and win a majority in the House, Trump's budget is likely to shape our lives.

Trump's budget hurts healthcare. It cuts Centers for Disease Control and Prevention programs for chronic disease prevention and health promotion by \$237 million. It cuts \$500 million from America's Health Block Grant, which would use funds from the Prevention and Public Health Fund for state-based chronic disease programs within CDC. It cuts \$897 million from National Cancer Institute funds. It eliminates health professions training programs. Over 10 years it cuts Medicare by \$845 billion, Medicaid and Affordable Care Act subsidies by \$777 billion. It eliminates Medicaid expansion under the ACA.

Of particular importance to eastern Oregon, Trump's budget contains many provisions that hurt rural communities, farmers and ranchers. It eliminates Rural Economic Development, Conservation Stewardship and Livestock Forage Disaster funding. It reduces the average premium subsidy for crop insurance from 62 percent to 48 percent. It eliminates the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program and Community Services Block Grant. It eliminates Preschool Development Grants and School Kitchen Equipment Grants. The budget reduces funding for the

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant and eliminates the TANF contingency fund.

Trump also hurts eastern Oregon rural communities by budget cuts that increase hunger and malnutrition. His budget cuts SNAP (Food Stamps) by about 30%, a \$220 billion reduction over the next 10 years, and eliminates SNAP-Education. It cuts funding for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) by 15% and maintains flat funding for the breast-feeding peer counselor program. It cuts National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs funds by \$1.7 billion over 10 years and eliminates funding for Farmers Market Nutrition and Food for Progress programs.

The President's budget reduces discretionary nonmilitary spending by 5% and increases military spending by 9%. If the proposed \$1.3 trillion cuts to nonmilitary programs had to be replaced by religious charity, each religious congregation in the US would have to give an extra \$375,000 per year for the next 10 years. Could your place of worship absorb those costs?

The Trump administration is proud of its proposed cuts to nonmilitary spending. According to a senior administration official expressing concern about the national debt, "This budget will have more reductions in spending than any president in history has ever proposed." Prior to COVID-19 legislation, the deficit has swollen largely because of the Republican tax cuts enacted last year.

If we truly want a 'Budget for America's Future,' as the President puts it, then we need a budget that ensures families have access to quality, affordable health care, enough food to feed their kids, affordable housing and decent-paying jobs with decent benefits. The President's budget takes us in the opposite direction.

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