

Bush budget targets 141 programs for elimination or drastic cutbacks

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The Bush administration released a detailed list Thursday of the federally funded programs it wants to cut or eliminate outright from its proposed 2007 budget. The White House has embarked on a public relations campaign to promote its budget plan, which must be approved by Congress.

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) list includes 91 programs to be killed off altogether and another 50 slated for major cutbacks. The administration aims to trim an estimated \$15 billion in spending on these “discretionary” programs, i.e., programs which must be funded by Congress every year.

These proposed cuts are in addition to the main target of cutbacks—entitlement programs, whose funding is mandatory. Bush seeks to cut \$65 billion in these programs over the next five years, more than half—\$36 billion—from Medicare, the federal program that provides health care to an estimated 42 million seniors and disabled people.

While the \$2.77 trillion budget proposed by Bush on Monday would ravage a range of programs relied upon by millions of working families, retirees and the poor, it would increase military spending by 4.8 percent—to a record \$439 billion. The administration will ask for an additional \$70 billion in spending, not included in the \$439 billion Pentagon appropriation, for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This is on top of \$50 billion in supplemental funding for the two wars approved by Congress only last December.

In an appearance Wednesday before the Business and Industry Association for New Hampshire, Bush stressed that the cuts were a matter of “setting priorities.” He told the well-heeled audience of executives: “Of course, you’d like to take a vacation every week, you know, some exotic place—but you’ve

got to set your priorities—you can’t do that. You want to do this or do that, go to a fancy restaurant every night, but that’s not setting priorities.”

Many of the programs Bush aims to cut or eliminate in the 2007 budget were also targeted in 2006. According to the White House, the administration was successful in convincing Congress to do away with or substantially reduce 89 out of 154 programs proposed for cuts last year. Utilizing baseball terminology, OMB Director Joshua Bolton boasted Wednesday to the House Budget Committee, “That’s a .578 batting average, which in this league isn’t just good, it’s terrific, particularly given the batting averages from previous years.”

As part of its campaign to win support for its budget-slashing, the government has set up the “expectmore.gov” web site, which rates programs as either “performing” or “not performing.” In his New Hampshire speech, Bush called on Congress to “sunset” those programs which were underperforming. “Get rid of ‘em,” he said.

A review of only a sampling of the programs included on the list indicates the human cost of the proposed cuts. Far from cutting back on exotic vacations or trips to fancy restaurants, they include cuts in such basic necessities as food subsidies for the elderly and poor, educational programs for low-income students, literacy programs, and arts education. They also threaten basic infrastructure and the environment.

The budget proposes to eliminate the **Commodity Supplemental Food Program**, for a saving of \$107 million. According to the government’s web site, “CSFP works to improve the health of low-income pregnant and breastfeeding women, other new mothers up to one year postpartum, infants, children up to age six, and elderly people at least 60 years of age by

supplementing their diets with nutritious USDA commodity foods."

The Bush administration proposes to slash close to \$3.5 billion from educational programs. In one of the largest budget reductions, \$1.2 billion would be cut from **vocational education state grants**; \$35 million would be cut from **arts education** in elementary and middle schools.

The entire \$99 million budget for the **Even Start Family Literacy Program** would be eliminated. Even Start takes an integrated approach to literacy training, involving families in projects for early childhood education and adult basic education.

The \$311 million budget for **Upward Bound**, a program serving low-income high school students for more than four decades, would be eliminated. Upward Bound programs provide instruction in math, laboratory science, composition, literature and foreign languages and seek to "increase the rates at which participants enroll in and graduate from institutions of postsecondary education."

Another program aimed at assisting low-income students—The Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs, or **GEAR UP**—would be eliminated, slashing \$303 million. GEAR UP provides services at high-poverty middle schools and high schools designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and graduate from colleges and universities.

Some of the proposed cutbacks are particularly cruel. The budget would eliminate the \$5 million **Dropout Prevention Program**. In another area of the budget, Bush wants to cut off monthly Social Security survivor benefits to 16- and 17-year-olds who drop out of high school. (The budget also calls for eliminating a \$255 lump-sum death payment that has been part of Social Security for more than 50 years.)

Bush has requested no funding for the **Community Services Block Grant** program, a cut of \$630 million. CSBG provides services "to alleviate the causes and conditions of poverty in communities" in such areas as employment, education, housing, nutrition, emergency services and health. Low-income individuals receiving assistance include the homeless, migrants and farm workers, the elderly and state-recognized Indian Tribes and tribal organizations. The \$79 million **Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers Training Program** would

also be eliminated.

Funds previously allocated to programs to support basic infrastructure and protect the environment would also be cut back in Bush's budget. Funding for **Amtrak**, the struggling national passenger rail system, would be cut by \$394 million. In an indication of the administration's real attitude towards airline safety, \$765 million would be slashed from the **Federal Aviation Administration's airport improvement program**.

The Department of Agriculture's **watershed protection and flood prevention operations** would be gutted, trimming \$75 million, along with \$270 million for the **environmental quality incentives program**. The \$30 million **wildlife habitat incentives program** would be eliminated. In the Department of the Interior, \$28 million would be cut for **land and water conservation fund state recreation grants**. By contrast, the budget allocates an increase of \$4 billion over the next five years for oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Other major budget reductions include:

- * \$196 million from local grants for agricultural research
- * \$50 million from the school construction program of Bureau of Indian Affairs
- * \$114 million from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.



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