

South Carolina budget cuts target education and health care

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The South Carolina legislature last week approved a \$4.9 billion state budget for the 2010-2011 fiscal year. The budget includes huge cuts in education, AIDS funding, and other social programs and includes no tax or fee increases. The budgetary cuts are part of a nationwide austerity policy being implemented in states across the country, cutting programs on which working people depend while preserving the profits of the wealthy corporations.

The bill will next make its way to the office of Republican Governor Mark Sanford, who will have the power to veto specific provisions before the bill is executed July 1.

House Speaker Bobby Harrell and Senate President Pro Tem Glenn McConnell, both Republicans, said they expect the legislature will agree to a number of likely vetoes by the governor when the bill returns to the legislature on June 15.

The budget, which would place spending at \$4.9 billion, represents a reduction of more than 25 percent compared to the 2006-2007 budget of \$6.658 billion.

Last Wednesday, the House was 13 votes short of agreeing to the version of the bill proposed on May 27 by a conference committee composed of six members from both the House and the Senate. On Thursday, minutes before the 5 p.m. deadline, Republicans who had been blocking passage of the budget agreed to a compromise on the issue of state health plan abortion coverage.

In March, a group of House Republicans rallied in an all-night session with the goal of ending all abortion coverage for rape and incest victims under the state health insurance plan. The Senate version of the bill

removed this provision, and the conference committee version did not restore it.

Republicans in favor of the abortion provision agreed to vote for the conference committee's version of the budget because of promises that a separate bill instituting a 24-hour waiting period for abortions and legislation to end abortion coverage in instances of rape and incest will be a legislative priority next year.

Education

Schools in South Carolina have already faced more than \$800 million in cuts over the past two years. On April 14, hundreds of people rallied in the capital to oppose further cuts.

Myrtle Beach's Horry County School District will likely have to cut \$17 million from its budget for the upcoming school year, based on the South Carolina budget approved Thursday. The school board will be deciding this week how to implement the cuts, which will undoubtedly fall hard on district students.

"The children are the ones who are losing on this," Charline Web, whose son is a middle school student in the district, told Myrtle Beach's WMBF News.

Misty Brigham, whose daughter is an elementary school, told reporters that "they don't need to start putting 30 to 40 students per classroom like has been talked about because that lowers my child's education."

Schools in the city of Charleston also face a likely cut

of \$7 million.

Health care

On May 25, 2010, several hundred people rallied at the South Carolina State House to protest budget cuts to the AIDS drug assistance program. The program provides AIDS medication to about 2,000 people who cannot afford the medication on their own.

Dr. Bambi Gaddist, who chairs the HIV/AIDS Care Crisis Taskforce, says the medication—which will now be unavailable to people who depend on the program—helps reduce the likelihood that the disease is spread. South Carolina ranks seventh in the country in newly reported HIV and AIDS cases, and this new reduction in spending will lead to a further deterioration of public health in the state.

A provision in the bill would also eliminate breast cancer screenings for 16,000 poor South Carolina women. Opponents of the cuts have cited cancer survival statistics, along with South Carolina's own recent breast cancer statistics, pointing to the vital need for such screenings.

According to experts, if detected early, 98 percent of those diagnosed with breast cancer are still alive five years later. If detected later, the five-year survival rate falls to 84 percent if the cancer has not spread, and falls dramatically, to only 23 percent, if the cancer has spread to other parts of the body.

Approximately 2,820 new cases of invasive breast cancer were diagnosed in South Carolina in 2009, and 640 women died of the disease.

According to the Best Chance Network (BCN), South Carolina already has one of the highest rates of uninsured women in the nation. The BCN is a division of the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control. It provides mammograms, clinical breast exams, pap screenings, pelvic exams, diagnostic procedures, and community education on breast/cervical cancer and early detection.

The jobs bill passed last Friday by the US House could lead to a further reduction of South Carolina's budget by \$175 million. To appease Republicans, Democratic lawmakers revoked provisions that would

have provided extra federal economic stimulus money to states and extended health insurance subsidies for unemployed workers.

Millions would be cut from South Carolina's Department of Health and Human Services programs, with Medicaid funding facing the biggest hit, at close to \$30 million. The Department of Health and Environmental Control, the Department of Mental Health, the Department of Social Services, Department of Health and Environmental Control, Department of Disabilities and Special Needs, the Department of Juvenile Justice, the Department of Probation, Parole & Pardon Services, and the Department of Motor Vehicles all face multimillion dollar cuts.



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