

Budget cuts slam Minnesota services

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25 September 2013

The federal “sequestration” budget cuts imposed in March have had a devastating impact on social services, education, research, and childcare in Minnesota. The cuts mark another step in the across-the-board assault on living conditions that has been waged over a period of decades by the Democratic and Republican parties.

Due to the cuts, roughly 1,000 poor and working class children will be slashed from the pre-school program Head Start. The Democratic-dominated state legislature has capped state support for Head Start at well-below average program costs, serving only about 10 percent of the need.

Gayle Kelly, director of the Minnesota Head Start Association, told the *Minnesota Post* that federal cuts would mean a reduction of 40 classrooms and the loss of 100 jobs in 34 Head Start programs across Minnesota.

In addition, a \$1.7 billion cut to the budget of the National Institutes of Health will lead to drastic cuts to research at the University of Minnesota and Mayo Clinic. The University will lose an estimated \$50 million and the Mayo Clinic expects to lose \$20 million.

“We just learned back in June that we were going to take a 40 percent cut for the next six months,” Dr. John Wagner, director of the University of Minnesota’s blood and marrow transplantation program, told Minnesota Public Radio. Wagner is slated to lose \$300,000 from research on treating leukemia, heart disease, and diabetes.

Cuts will also lead to a reduction of 700 competitive research grants, as well as a reduction in the number of graduate student researchers.

The sequester cuts will hit Minnesota’s native tribes especially hard since native tribes receive most funding from the federal government.

Poverty rates for Minnesota and South Dakota Native

Americans are already amongst the highest in the country. Fifty percent of Native Americans in Rapid City, South Dakota are impoverished, according to Census Bureau data. Forty-eight percent of Native Americans in Minneapolis are below the poverty line. Federal budget cuts will surely cause these rates to rise.

Over half of the White Earth Ojibwe tribe’s funding comes from the federal government. Of that funding, leaders of the northwestern Minnesota tribe are expecting 14 percent cuts in the coming two years, with deeper cuts likely to follow. Federal cuts forced the tribe to fire teachers and support staff this summer.

On the Red Lake (Chippewa) Indian Reservation in Beltrami and Clearwater counties, the school district will be forced to cut \$1.3 million from its budget in the coming year. Teachers and staff have already been fired in preparation for the cuts.

Millions of dollars will also be cut from suicide prevention services for Native Americans, whose suicide rates are four times the national average due to acute poverty. On the Oglala Sioux reservation in neighboring South Dakota, reductions in funding mean a reduction in necessary mental health staff.

“Since the beginning of the year, there have been 100 suicide attempts in 110 days on Pine Ridge. We can’t take any more cuts. We just can’t,” said Cathy Abramson, chairwoman of the National Indian Health Board, in an interview with Minnesota Public Radio. Such figures are shocking considering the reservation has a population of only 28,000 people.

On top of the cuts already made, the US House of Representatives voted last week to cut \$40 billion from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) commonly known as food stamps. The proposed cuts would eliminate food stamp benefits for 40,000 Minnesotans—7 percent of the recipient total in the state. The Minnesota SNAP average benefits are a paltry \$3.86 a day, or roughly \$1.29 per person, per

meal.

These cuts are being made as part of a protracted effort to restructure social relations in the United States in the interests of the financial aristocrats. The sequester cuts were supported by both Republicans and Democrats, and were signed into law by President Barack Obama.

Obama touted the cuts as “smart,” and noted that they are “not going to be an apocalypse I think, as some people said. It’s just dumb.”

“We will get through this,” Obama told reporters in March. But who is the “we” to which Obama refers? Certainly not the working class children he is kicking out of pre-school, nor the infirm, whose diseases will remain untreated due to a lack of research funding, nor the millions on food stamps who already face starvation on \$3.86 a day.

On the other side, Obama’s supporters on Wall Street, in Congress, and in the military-intelligence apparatus have reaped billions of dollars in the aftermath of the financial disaster. Though the Democrats and Republicans repeat the lie that “there is no money” to provide food, housing, education, and health care to the American population, trillions are made available to purchase the junk assets of Wall Street banks or to level Syria with expensive Tomahawk missiles.

There is plenty of money.

Last week, a Forbes study showed that five Minnesotans are amongst the 400 richest Americans. Only a share of the combined wealth of those five individuals—a total of \$15.5 billion—would more than make up for the federal budget cuts.



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