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Bush: Analysts say proposals a political game

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"If we had been able to just lower taxes and to cut deeply into basic programs that really do help a lot of families, that would be one thing; but what the president is proposing is deep cuts to Medicaid," Leachman said.

Lynn Read, deputy administrator at the office of medical assistance programs for the Oregon Department of Human Services, said while the proposed budget harms Medicaid's financial state, there are other aspects of the budget that are beneficial.

According to the White House Web site, the proposed federal budget would improve health care in the country by creating more than 1,200 community health centers nationwide to "make health care more accessible."

Read said investing more money in federally qualified health centers is a helpful way of "expanding that safety net," but she added the costs of such an endeavor could be quite high.

Part of the budget also includes a change in how states reimburse for prescription drugs, which Read said could prove to be a more accurate and financially fair reimbursement process. The budget would switch Medicaid reimbursement for pharmaceuticals to a system that uses the average sales price rather than the average wholesale price, which the National Conference of State Legislatures said inflates reimbursements. The change is expected to save \$542 million in 2006, according to the NCSL.

Read said the budget also includes increased support for a children's vaccine program, which could prove

very beneficial.

"It seems like any expansion that would allow children access to vaccines would be positive," Read said.

Carl Hosticka, an emeritus associate professor in the public policy, planning and management department and a Portland City Councilor for District 3, said it is important to remember that the budget is just a proposal and has to pass through Congress before any adjustments can be made.

"These budgets are very political and very often the game isn't about what the person who proposed the budget actually wants to see enacted into law; it's about what political trade-offs they can force the other side to make," Hosticka said.

Hosticka, who served as a state representative in Lane County from 1983 to 1994, said Bush's rate increase proposal for BPA and his plan for Medicaid are unlikely to make it through both Congressional chambers and are primarily political statements about the need for fiscal responsibility.

"It's not a very pretty way of doing things, and that's part of why the public is so skeptical over how (politicians) do business," Hosticka said, referring to the process of political bargaining.

Rep. Peter Buckley, D-Ashland, said it is unlikely the budget will make it through Congress without undergoing significant changes, and the proposal should be seen more as a representation of the Bush administration's ideological priorities than its immediate policy plans.

"It does give kind of a horrifying view of what the priorities of the

administration are," Buckley said, adding that the budget proposal is "fiscally irresponsible and morally reprehensible."

Leachman said proposed tax cuts add insult to injury for those who will already be feeling the effects of the reduction in Medicaid funding by giving relief to the very wealthy and not the families struggling to get by.

Many low- and middle-income families have seen tax decreases under the Bush administration and Leachman said those were beneficial but become overshadowed by the program cuts being proposed.

A decrease in food stamp funding as proposed in the budget would harm the improvements to Oregon's hunger rate that have come about since the state expanded the qualifications for the food stamp program, Leachman said.

"We would have to scale back the program, and we think that will hurt Oregon's anti-hunger act," Leachman said.

Hosticka said the political ideology behind Bush's budget proposal is such that the consequences of the proposal could be an irrelevant topic of discussion because of the likelihood it will go through drastic changes.

Leachman said the impact political ideologies have on policymaking is apparent with each year's budget proposal.

"It becomes quite clear that it does make a difference who's president," Leachman said.

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Education: Funding cuts impact research projects

Continued from page 1

submitted," said Andy Clark, senior associate director for federal affairs at the Oregon University System.

Clark said the State Board hasn't taken up any formal consideration of budget items yet, but that it will be paying close attention to what's happening on the federal level.

The White House is planning on four more annual increases to Pell Grants to bring the total award per student to \$4,550.

Increases to Pell Grants will be beneficial to low-income students, said Elizabeth Bickford, director of Student Financial Aid. She sees both positive and negative points in the budget.

"We're always in support of the needy students receiving more grant money," Bickford said.

"(The Perkins Program) has me a little worried; it's the one I'm keeping my eye on," she said.

A Perkins loan is a mix of federal and institutional dollars.

"A certain amount of the federal share that we've been receiving over time may go back to the federal government, which reduces the amount of money that we can lend out to students," Bickford said.

Research activities also depend on

federal dollars.

"Federal investment in academic research has been critical from World War II to the present," said Richard Linton, vice president for research and graduate studies. "About 85 percent of our (research) grants are federal in origin."

Linton added that the budget, which the White House described as a "pause" in research funding increases, had a 2 percent overall gain in items related to research. The National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health and the federal Department of Education have the most impact on research money.

"Considering the federal deficit, I'm worried that it's more of a halt than a pause," Linton said. "Research is key to U.S. competitiveness in the global economy. All of this is a major ongoing concern."

Research dollars could also impact graduate studies.

"Many of those grants include research assistantships and teaching fellowships. If those budgets are flat or decline, we're going to have more trouble supporting our graduate students," Linton said.

The U.S. Student Association, a national lobbyist group comprised of

students, will help represent the interests of University students.

Ashley Rees, ASUO federal affairs coordinator and representative to USSA, said that overall, she isn't happy with the budget.

"The budget doesn't prioritize higher education," said Rees, who didn't feel the Pell Grant increase was worth the tradeoff in terminated programs.

"One in three of (the program cuts) are education-related," she added.

USSA will be lobbying in Congress over spring break to encourage student-friendly changes to the budget.

Rees said she believes senators and representatives are supportive of USSA. "I'm confident that they at least support our goal of increasing access," she said.

Clark said the program cuts will bolster opposition or support for those programs.

"This year I believe that Congress will get to the re-authorization of the Higher Education Act," Clark said. "(The president is) sending a message to the authorizing committees that these are programs that he doesn't want to see in the reauthorization. He's created groups to fight for the things they care about."

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