

Tax Cuts, Budget Cuts

Jina Kim, 3/4/2003

Republicans are usually perceived to be realistic and pragmatic, but President Bush is being surprisingly idealistic and optimistic in these pre-war days. He implements tax cuts, hoping that the economy will benefit. Despite lack of funding, he wants states “to improve education, health care, and domestic security” (2/25/2003, A22, Robert Pear, “Governors Get Sympathy From Bush but No More Money”). The media has continually covered the effects of Bush’s budget proposal on education, juvenile delinquency, and afterschool programs.

Bush has proposed significant cuts to the federal government’s Impact Aid program, which supplies funds to school districts that have students from military families. Bob Herbert describes the situation in Virginia Beach, where Bush’s budget cuts would slash its \$12 million in Impact Aid to \$4.5 million (2/20/2003, A31, “A Strange Budget Cut”). Herbert quotes Dr. Jenney, the district’s superintendent, who explains that the proposal ““would be fairly devastating...[w]e’re very lean with our operating funds, the lowest per pupil in the area...we’re not flush with money to begin with.”” Bush proposes continuing Impact Aid for children with parents living on a military base, but not for those living off base. In Virginia Beach, most families do not live on the base. And with the pending war, student psychological and guidance services are burdened by lack of funds.

The president’s budget proposal also cut \$250 million from juvenile accountability incentive block grants and reduced afterschool programs by \$400 million. In “Lifeline for Troubled Oregon Teenagers is Imperiled by Planned U.S. Cuts”, Fox Butterfield describes a successful Portland, Oregon program known as New Avenues for

Youth, which may be eliminated due to the budget cuts (3/9/2003, A26). This program, started in Multnomah County, sends troubled juveniles to privately run centers to receive clinical evaluation, drug treatment, and a second chance at life. Since the inception of New Avenues for Youth, the number of teenagers in the juvenile jail has decreased by 73 percent, but now it may be terminated due to Bush's budget proposal.

In his State of the Union address, Bush introduced a \$150 million program that pairs children with incarcerated parents and disadvantaged middle school students with mentors. However, Butterfield reports that "law enforcement officials, child welfare advocates, school administrators and even some conservative Republicans...are worried about the proposals, particularly when...juvenile crime has started to rise again." Although the administration offers needed mentoring, it takes funds from after-school programs.

Bush's response to the states' cry for monetary assistance is weak and insufficient. He has made it clear that the federal government cannot help the states now. He points to his support for tax cuts as the solution for increasing federal and state revenues. There are too many uncertainties to his answer. How long will it take for the economy to improve? How much will eliminating taxes on stock dividends help?

President Bush wants the best of all worlds, a land where tax cuts, budget cuts, and a pending war can coexist in harmony with the public. His strategies do not impress nor convince me. As he pushes forth with this ideal, the children are getting left behind.