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TOPICAL

Paul Soglin: Donald Trump budget would take country back to the '60s ... the 1860s

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MOLLY BECK, STATE JOURNAL

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Michael Johnson, right, CEO of the Boys & Girls Club of Dane County, said hours and staffing at the organization's two neighborhood clubs could be cut if federal Community Development Block Grant funding is eliminated as proposed by President Donald Trump.

Madison Mayor Paul Soglin railed against President Donald Trump's proposed federal budget cuts Friday, emphasizing the impact two grant programs have had in helping fund community centers and low-income housing.

Soglin said Trump's proposal would return the country to the 19th century antebellum period in terms of public illness, poverty and "a very bleak future."

"The cuts are devastating," Soglin said. "This is not a budget prepared out of ignorance, but one prepared out of malice."

Trump's budget proposal cuts \$54 billion, or 10 percent, from discretionary nondefense spending in 2018 and increases defense spending by the same amount. It also increases funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs, which Soglin welcomed.

But he said putting cuts to housing, nutrition and health into the military "are among the most dangerous to our national security that I've seen in all the years I've been in office."

"To welcome it as a blueprint for the future is not only nonsensical but extremely dangerous to the future of the country and our nation's security," Soglin said, referring to the term used by House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Janesville.

Ryan spokesman Ian Martorana said while the president submits the budget to Congress for review, Congress sets the actual funding levels for the programs through the appropriations process.

"While I cannot say where funding levels will end up, our members will work their will through regular order," Martorana said.

Trump is proposing to eliminate Community Development Block Grants, which cost \$3 billion a year, and the HOME Investment Partnership program, which along with cuts to other housing programs is expected to save \$1.1 billion.

Trump's budget document says the CDBG program "is not well-targeted to the poorest populations and has not demonstrated results." State and local governments are better positioned to provide the services of the HOME program, according to the Trump administration.

Soglin rejected that criticism of the program as "showing the ignorance along with the mean political ideology that pervades the Trump White House."

Madison receives \$1.7 million a year in CDBG funds and \$1.1 million in HOME funds. Another \$3 million comes in the form of revolving loan repayments.

Madison uses \$350,000 in CDBG funds each year to support the daily operations of 10 neighborhood centers, including the Boys & Girls Club, Vera Court Neighborhood Center, Wil-Mar Neighborhood Center, Goodman Community Center and the Kennedy Heights Community Center, Soglin said. The funding also has gone to nonprofit groups such as Porchlight's 24 units of housing for the homeless on Lien Road, the Troy Community Gardens and loans to the Literacy Network, Operation Fresh Start and Red Caboose day care center.

"The statement that these programs aren't working is just plain stupid and I really believe it's driven by a right-wing political ideology," Soglin said.

Other proposed cuts that could affect Madison in the future include elimination of Transit New Start and TIGER grants, which the city is hoping to use for a satellite bus facility and the development of bus rapid transit, projects that total \$66.8 million in the city's 2017 capital budget.

Dane County officials are still examining the full impact of Trump's proposal, but CDBG funding totals about \$1.4 million a year for affordable housing and economic development projects.

"Everything the president is doing is the opposite of what communities need right now," said Dane County Executive Joe Parisi. "Under his budget, people are going to lose their health care, waters will be more polluted and those struggling to make ends meet will suffer, all so the wealthy can pay fewer taxes."

Michael Johnson, CEO of the Boys & Girls Club of Dane County, said the group's two centers receive \$300,000 in CDBG funds that help pay for things such as a proposed dental clinic at its Allied Drive center. Losing the funding would result in reduced hours of operations and layoffs, he said.

Johnson said he could understand if the federal government wanted to put parameters in place to track whether programs are effective, but "to outright eliminate it is going to hurt children in this community."

More information

