

THE 2018 TRUMP BUDGET - GOODBYE SAFETY NET (by Bill Woods, StreetVibes Contributor)

Chances are, you haven't spent much time examining the details of the Administration's proposed 2018 budget. Most of us are too consumed by the daily White House crises to do much else. New revelations about the Russian connections, the President's outrageous Tweets, and the recent rejection of the Paris Accord absorb our focus. However, certain activities taking place in the shadows of all the hoopla require our attention.

The announcement of Trump's proposed 2018 Budget is one such activity. Quietly announced while the President was out of the country, the proposal essentially eliminates what we often refer to as "the safety net." Not since the crafting of the first budget of Ronald Reagan has there been such a major assault on federal programs and services for those in need.

Spelled out in cold statistics, the Trump Budget would slash billions of dollars from basic safety net programs. For instance, it proposes over the next decade to cut more than \$800-billion from Medicaid, the major federal health care program for the poor. Over this same ten year span, it would eliminate \$192-billion from the Food Stamp Program. Finally, another \$272-billion would be cut from various welfare programs including \$21-billion from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program.

That total doesn't even include domestic programs that are annually funded by Congress. Excluding homeland security, funding for these domestic programs would absorb a 10.6

percent cut (\$57-billion). Most of the affordable housing programs administered by HUD fall into this category. Facing total elimination in this budget document is the student loan program that assists low-income applicants to attend college.

What more can be said about this draconian document? If Ronald Reagan began dismantling what he derisively referred to as "the welfare state" in the 1980s, the 2018 Trump Budget goes a long way toward finishing the job. After more than thirty-five years of Congress whittling away at safety net programs, the enactment of this budget would clearly make the U.S. the most Scrooge-like country of all the economically advanced nations in the world.

The good news is this document is a proposal, and it faces stiff opposition in the Senate and the House of Representatives. Democrats will take the lead in opposing safety net cuts, but Republicans will also want to put their own stamp on any budget bill. The bad news is that Trump's cuts in welfare, Medicaid, and programs for those in need fit the ideology of a vast majority of GOP Representatives. They will generally support this movement to eliminate or shrink federal revenue for anti-poverty efforts.

This dramatic push to dismantle the safety net should be a wake up call to those of us who know the need for the programs that make it up. Instead of merely having to oppose the smaller cuts that have cropped up in every recent federal budget, we are confronted by these massive reductions. Blocking the Administration's proposal and reversing this trend will require a well coordinated grassroots movement in communities across the country. It will be a very tough

struggle, and it won't happen over night. The first step of this critical effort seems to be recognizing the enormity of the task.