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Contact Us

3980 Broadway Suite 103 Box 139
Boulder, CO 80304
Phone: 303.448.9105
Toll free: 888.891.9416
Fax: 208.247.1830

Staff List

Deb Courson
Managing Editor
Contact

Chris Thomas
Western Editor
Contact

Mary Hulsebus
Senior Operations Associate
Contact

Kimberly Lavender
Development Director
Contact

Amber Wilson
Community Engagement Director
Contact

Matt Hemmendinger
Digital Development/Social Media
Director
Contact

Lark Corbeil
Founder
Contact

David Crandall
Business Manager
Contact

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Analysts: Ryan Budget Would Throw WV into "Crisis"

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CHARLESTON, W.Va. - Rep. Paul Ryan, the new GOP candidate for vice president, was the architect of the budget plan that passed in the U.S. House this spring. Some budget analysts say that plan would throw a state budget that's already facing cuts into a full-blown crisis.

There's already less federal support for West Virginia's Medicaid program, and Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin says all state agencies have to cut spending.

Sean O'Leary, a policy analyst for the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy compares that to Ryan's plan, which would slash Medicaid by one-third over 10 years - more than triple the current federal reductions.

"We're experiencing trouble with Medicaid just from the match rate changing half a percentage point. Imagine if that half percentage point becomes 30 percent. Then we're talking about a real crisis, not a discomfort."

Ryan, R-Wis., has defended the cuts by saying the states would have more flexibility in their programs. But budget analysts say that in the recession, the states already have squeezed as much efficiency as they can from them and would have little choice but to raise taxes.

Economists say hundreds of thousands of jobs lost in state and local governments in the past three years have helped slow the national economy. Michael Leachman, director of state fiscal research for the Center on Budget And Policy Priorities, says the Ryan budget would worsen that situation.

"Further cuts would just make it even harder for states and localities to repair the budget damage the recession caused, and it would basically assure that state and local cuts continue to be a drag on the national recovery."

Much of federal discretionary non-defense spending goes to support states. Outside of Medicaid, half of that support goes to transportation and public education. The Ryan budget would reduce that, too - cutting \$200 million from West Virginia's budget in 2014. Leachman says it would undermine historic federal support for things most people want.

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"To educate kids, to build roads, to provide clean water, these sorts of things would be less than half the average of the last 35 years."

Details on the Ryan budget impact by state are online at cbpp.org.

Dan Heyman, Public News Service - WV

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