

washingtonpost.com

Some Pet Programs Are Targeted for Cuts

By Dana Milbank and Dan Morgan
Washington Post Staff Writers
Thursday, February 5, 2004; Page A11

President Bush's new budget proposes to cut numerous programs that he and others in his administration have previously hailed as successes or top priorities.

Among the dozens of programs marked for elimination or reductions in a list the White House issued this week are programs in homeland security, housing, education, the environment and international aid that the administration had previously labeled important. Examples include an early-childhood education program praised by the White House, an arts program celebrated by Laura Bush, an industrial cleanup program highlighted at a presidential event, an AIDS fund championed by the administration, and funds for emergency workers and bioterrorism preparedness.

In some cases, the proposed cuts are continuations of long-standing battles with Congress; in other cases, the administration has expanded related programs. But the wide range of cuts Bush has proposed, even for causes he favors, is a sign of the difficult position he is in as he seeks to restrain spending and rein in the deficit.

White House spokesman Trent Duffy said the budget reflects better ways to achieve Bush's priorities rather than a change in priorities. "This president wants to fund what works," Duffy said. "In many cases, there's a better way, or a higher priority for the funds."

Bush has often vowed "to make sure that our first responders, the brave police and firefighters and emergency management teams, get resources necessary to do the job you expect them to do." But he proposed an 18.4 percent cut in funds for first responders, an \$805 million reduction the administration says is justified because it does not believe those funds are "targeted" to homeland security capabilities.

Similarly, the administration has cited help for states and cities to "improve their public health and medical infrastructures" as a key achievement in "winning the war on terrorism." But Bush proposed a 10 percent, or \$144 million, cut in grants to help state, local and hospital bioterrorism efforts, saying the money will be shifted in part to a new biosurveillance initiative.

In the environmental area, the president proposed eliminating \$25 million in Department of Housing and Urban Development grants to rehabilitate "brownfield" industrial sites; the Office of Management and Budget said other programs are "more effective." But two years ago, when Bush went to Pennsylvania to highlight his administration's commitment to brownfields, the White House issued a press release celebrating the fact that his 2003 budget "includes \$25 million in funding for urban redevelopment and brownfields cleanup through" HUD.

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Likewise, the president has again proposed eliminating the \$149 million spent on the HOPE VI program that demolishes distressed public housing. In 2002, Bush flew to Atlanta to hail the success of a public housing complex that received HOPE VI grants.

The president's budget also sets a different tone on some international aid issues. In 2001, he held a Rose Garden event to herald the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis. This year, he proposed \$200 million for the fund. The White House said that fulfills Bush's promise to spend \$1 billion over five years and notes that he is increasing AIDS spending in other areas. But the amount for the global fund would be a 64 percent cut from current spending of \$550 million.

Likewise, the Labor Department boasts that it supports international efforts to end child labor. "These projects rescue children from trafficking and exploitative work situations," a 2003 White House fact sheet says. But the president's budget proposed cutting the Labor Department's Bureau of International Affairs by 73 percent, or \$80 million, saying this "reverses the previous administration's policy" in favor of "a modest grant program for child labor."

Bush proposed cutting some previously cherished education programs. The budget eliminated the \$35 million Arts in Education program, saying it has "limited impact." But a year ago, Laura Bush singled out the program for praise in New York. The president proposed eliminating the \$247 million Even Start literacy program, calling it ineffective. But previously, the White House praised Even Start, saying it "improves the educational opportunities of children and their parents in low-income areas."

Beyond those cuts the White House identified, congressional aides have identified a number of apparent cuts in the homeland security budget that seem at odds with the administration's stated priorities.

Discretionary spending on the U.S. citizenship and immigration services, for example, was reduced from \$236 million this year to \$140 million in 2005, despite the president's plan to create a guest worker program. A White House budget office official said the shortfall would be made up by collecting \$150 million more from visa applicants.

Congressional aides said a \$125 million port security account in the 2004 budget had been eliminated, despite the administration's acknowledgment in a foreword to the budget that "port security is a top priority of the Department of Homeland Security." The White House official said \$1.9 billion would go to port security in 2005.

In a different part of the budget, a proposed \$11 million cut in nuclear energy research drew fire from Sen. Pete V. Domenici (R-N.M.), who chairs the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. He said this "could undermine" a shift to using more nuclear energy, a goal of Bush's National Energy Policy from May 2001.

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