Congress Blog: Standing Fairness on Its Head

By Arnold L. Mitchem; posted March 8, 2011

The House of Representatives recently passed legislation that severely cuts funding for programs targeted toward low-income Americans and their families. House Republicans declared this a victory for the American people.

I ask Republicans, how could funding cuts for low-income students and their families be good for our economy and our democracy? On the contrary, this move is flagrantly regressive in its economic impact and unfair to our neediest citizens.

Their agenda is alarming on many fronts. The House slashed student aid funding for federal programs such as SEOG and LEAP and reduced the maximum Pell grant by $845. They cut funding for TRIO and GEAR UP programs, our country’s signature college access and retention programs, by almost 3 percent and 6 percent, respectively.

They also voted to cut community block grants by 45 percent and eliminate many programs that, while tiny in comparison to the total federal budget, are important to the communities they serve.

For instance, how would reducing the TRIO programs, which made up only 0.7 percent of the federal budget in FY 2010 and serves just 10 percent of the eligible population, make any real difference in reducing our national debt?

How will America be poised to compete globally if we continue to deprive low-income communities of resources or keep post-secondary education out of the reach of our youth?

I am afraid that proposing or passing these measures signals just the beginning of attempts by policymakers in the House to deliberately target a largely voiceless constituency, low-income students and their families.

I agree that we must recognize America’s spending over the past decade has outpaced its income, and the gap between the rich and poor is widening. This is a recipe for disaster. The possible results could be the protests and demonstrations taking place right now in Wisconsin, but only on a national level. Can you imagine the possible days, or even, months of political unrest following policy that continues to leave behind low income Americans? Especially at this time, when recent reports

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indicate that for the first time over 50 percent of public school students are receiving a free or reduced-price lunch. Therefore, let me sound the alarm: In the current deficit reduction fervor, low-income Americans are getting the shortest end of the stick, and ultimately, all of us will pay.

We must not allow lawmakers to pass measures that hinder our nation’s long-term economic prospects and unfairly burden our neediest citizens. America’s future lies in its ability to produce a well-educated, well-equipped 21st century workforce, and for that reason, as well as for our fundamental values, we must not forget about low-income Americans.

Arnold L. Mitchem, Ph.D., is the president of the Council for Opportunity in Education, the only national organization dedicated to furthering the expansion of postsecondary opportunities for low-income and first-generation students.

Weber State University has a Veterans Upward Bound project and it expected that the program will begin writing in June.

This grant cycle Veterans Upward Bound will have to increase our numbers just to be able to obtain the same funding we were awarded in 2007. VUB programs across the country are not anticipating another budget increase for the entire 5 year cycle of the coming grant cycle. This is not specific to Veterans Upward Bound, however. All Federal TRiO Programs are facing this reality.

The VUB project’s grant cycle ends August 31st so the project hopes for a timely competition process so it can be notified before the end of August.

DRAFT APPLICATIONS OPEN FOR COMMENTS

Draft applications for the Upward Bound Math/Science program and the Veterans Upward Bound program were released in April. Comments are due by May 9, 2012. Once comments have been considered the applications guidelines will be finalized and the grand writing process will begin.

Not All Tax Dollars Go To War: Here Is a Program Liberals Can Be Proud Of

By: Deborah Foster

April 15, 2012

Every good liberal knows the value of a functioning government. Unlike conservatives, we can actually generate long lists of benefits and services provided by government. So, it is usually with a sense of patriotic duty that liberals pay their taxes. There are always things to begrudge. How many people actually signed on to having their money go to pay for war?
STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

SSS STUDENT ADVISORY BOARD: DEFINING CHANGES

Our Student Advisory Board was formed just a few years ago. This vibrant, fluid group includes different members each year. One might expect the Board to have the same goals each year and repeat the same projects year after year. However, the activities of the Board are fluid every year. Their first year, the Board put on a student leadership conference titled “Opportunity Rocks.” In addition to inviting fellow Student Support Services participants from WSU, the conference was open to other SSS participants from around Utah. Another year the Board worked on service projects. Most recently these students focused on the academic involvement of fellow SSS students.

During the 2011-2012 academic year, four Board members led SSS participants in exploring what clubs and organizations relate to their majors. Board members met with the Deans of Health Professions, College of Science, College of Arts & Humanities, and the College of Social & Behavioral Sciences. Each of the Deans was generous with time and advice. While our Board members are chosen in part because of their involvement on campus, they learned a great deal about their own colleges and departments.

Every year the Student Advisory Board bases its projects on ways SSS participants can get involved on campus. Students learn about leadership, the importance of community involvement, and opportunities for them to be involved in their course of study beyond the classroom. In addition to the benefit of the Advisory Board on SSS participants, the Board members themselves learn from their work. Board members learn to become leaders. They share that with incoming students. Board members also benefit from an Activity Waiver. Being on the Board is a valuable experience for our participants.

TRIO Day 2012

Each year TRIO Programs around the country celebrate TRIO’s accomplishments. They celebrate the hard work and dedication of staff. They celebrate the hard work and dedication of participants. This year the WSU TRIO Programs showcased several students explaining, “Because of TRIO...” Each student appeared on a poster explaining where she was because of TRIO.

This is Paige Jones.
TALENT SEARCH

SPRING SEMESTER MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS FROM TALENT SEARCH

Jan. 20- The Talent Search program partnered with the counseling departments at Ogden and Ben Lomond High Schools and with the Weber State Women's Center for a Young Mothers' field trip to Weber State. A dozen new or expecting young mothers from the high schools were able to have a brief tour of the Women's Center and hear about the services provided to young parents through the Women's Center and Non-Traditional Student Center. Students heard success stories from other young or single parents who have overcome various challenges to be successful within higher education.

Feb. 23-25- Nine Talent Search students were invited to learn leadership skills and interact with TRIO students from across the state at the annual TRIO Youth Leadership Conference. The conference this year was held at Dixie State College in St. George. Students participated in workshops which provided teambuilding and leadership training as well as hearing from past TRIO participants who have demonstrated success in life beyond their college graduation.

Mar. 24- WSU Talent Search partnered with the Health Careers Opportunity Program (HCOP) to provide local students (including Talent Search students) with preparation for the upcoming ACT Test. Students attended workshops which helped with strategies and content refreshers to optimize their performance on the test.

Apr. 4- Talent Search students visited three Salt Lake City higher education institutions. The Northern Utah Tour began with a visit to Westminster College followed by a tour of University of Utah. The day finished with a visit and tour of the Salt Lake Community College Redwood Road Campus.

Upcoming Events

May 17- Senior Talent Search participants will be recognized for their achievements. Scholarship recipients will be recognized.

May 29-31- Talent Search participants will visit four colleges on our annual Southern Utah Tour. Visits will include tours of Utah Valley University, Snow College, Southern Utah University, and Dixie State College.

June 7 & 12- Incoming 8th & 9th grade students will visit the Weber State campus for a one-day summer college camp. Participants will choose between a "Bot Build" with the College of Applied Science & Technology (COAST) or to do dissections with HCOP.
UPWARD BOUND COMMUNITY SERVICE

Upward Bound students have participated in six community service activities thus far in 2012. Some of their activities have included…

- An Upward Bound blood drive; students organized and participated in this event
- Dancer check-in and registration at WSU’s annual Powwow
- Assisting families in need at Catholic Community Services’ Hall Food Bank
- Preparation of local families for an earthquake as part of Utah’s Great Shake Out
- Raised money for the YCC by volunteering at the annual “Celebrating Women Tea” event
- Collected food for needy families through the “Stamp Out Hunger” food drive

UB students will also assist with the set-up and clean-up of the Ogden Arts Festival in June.

Student Accomplishments

Cristian Gutierrez, junior, played the bagpipes during the funeral procession for Officer Jared Franchom.

Upward Bound senior Irene Buenrostro was selected as the Weber-Davis Boys and Girls Club Youth of the Year. She was awarded a $500 scholarship and went on to compete at the state level.

Eight Upward Bound students (sophomores and juniors) attended TRiO Leadership Conference at Dixie State College.

A number of our seniors have been awarded scholarships in 2012. Karessa Sanders, Sammy Lee, and Evelyn Hernandez were awarded Honors at Entrance Scholarships to WSU. Amadeo Ocampo was awarded the Horatio Alger Scholarship in the amount of $5000. Nate Cutler will attend Western Wyoming Community College on a soccer scholarship. Esmeralda Rodarte received a $400 scholarship to Snow College.

UB junior Yajaira Peralta has been awarded two scholarships in the past two months: the Utah NAME Scholarship, in the amount of $1000, and the Jiffy Lube Scholarship, in the amount of $1500. Additionally, Yajaira was featured in the Standard Examiner as part of an article on multicultural students.

The Upward Bound program has just learned that it has been funded for another 5 year cycle.
The spring semester has been full of professional development for the staff of Veterans Upward Bound. Jan Pollard attended a training session concerning financial aid advising of participants put on by the Council of Opportunity in Education. Jim Shepherd attended an annual Math conference. Yulia Goff attended the ASPIRE Utah state meeting and the Student Affairs Academy and both Dan Czech and Randy Wilson attended the annual conference for the National Association of Veterans Upward Bound. The staff should now be well prepared for the coming year as we continue to support veterans in their educational pursuits.

Two of our participants were presented scholarship $500 checks this spring by the Utah Veterans Administration. Another student was nominated for a $1,000 scholarship that is through the NAVUB organization.

Two of our participants supported National TRIO Day by helping TRIO programs on campus in their campaign to come to the forefront of the campus’ attention. They wrote testimonials on paper and allowed us to photograph them for publicity purposes. One, Joe Schlicter, is pictured here as he proudly lets people know how much VUB has been an asset to his education.

During our May Awards Banquet VUB honored Bill Christophersen with the Golden Grenade Award. This award goes to a member of the community who has played an outstanding role in helping veterans attain their educational goals.

(Dan Czeck– VUB; Bill Christophersen: Terry Schow-Veterans Administration)

On September 1, 2012 Veterans Upward Bound begins its 34th year of service to veterans at WSU!
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When we consider what we do want to pay for, we believe in public schools, healthcare, and infrastructure. We know the names of big ticket government programs like Medicaid and SNAP (food stamps), but there are also lesser-known government programs that liberals can feel good about investing their tax dollars in.

While some programs from the War on Poverty eventually fell by the wayside, many of the educational programs Johnson proposed continue to operate effectively to this day. People are familiar with many of the big name programs such as Head Start, Pell Grants, and student loans. This article focuses on the TRiO programs, sister programs to Head Start, which frequently few people have heard about. Currently, these programs face major funding cuts in the Ryan Budget, despite decades of intervention on behalf of the poor.

“I shall never forget the faces of the boys and the girls…, and I remember even yet the pain of realizing and knowing then that college was closed to practically every one of those children because they were too poor. And I think it was then that I made up my mind that this Nation could never rest while the door to knowledge remained closed to any American.” - President Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965

One of the first pieces of government legislation designed to fight poverty was the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, and in this statute, TRiO was started with the proposal of an educational outreach program for high schools students called Project Upward Bound. Along with Upward Bound, the Economic Opportunity Act also passed the preschool program, Project Head Start. Both programs became immediately controversial, because there were Senators and Congress members who believed the programs were illegally promoting civil and voting rights. Educational program leaders were accused of inciting racial agitation or participating in civil rights protests. In order to reinstate funding for Head Start in the state of Mississippi, several busses of five-year old children had to go to Washington, D.C. to plead for services.

Johnson’s major postsecondary educational program was the “Higher Education Act of 1965” which focused on funding for lower income students, including grants, work-study money, and government loans. TRiO’s Talent Search, the second educational outreach program, was created as part of the Higher Education Act. In 1968, Student Support Services, which was originally known as Special Services for Disadvantaged Students, was authorized by the Higher Education Amendments and became the third in a series of educational opportunity programs. By 1969, the original three educational opportunity programs, Upward Bound, Talent Search and Student Support Services, had been created and coined “TRiO.”

Upward Bound works with high school students year round, but in the summer brings them to college campuses for six weeks of intensive academic instruction. Student Support Services serves currently enrolled college students by providing them with academic mentoring, counseling and tutoring.

Evaluations of Student Support Services have shown that it has statistically positive effects on college retention, number of semester credits earned, and semester GPAs. Not bad considering that the evaluation also showed that the program was serving a lot of single parents, older students, and students with academic difficulties.
While each TRiO program focuses on students at different stages in their education ranging from middle school all the way through college, they each share the goals of reaching out to disadvantaged groups and extending them services to gain access to a college education. It is poverty reduction via upward mobility using higher education as the means. And why are the services so necessary? Only 38% of high school seniors in the lowest income quartile attempt college compared to 81% of the highest income quartile. Of those low income students who do enroll in college, only 21% finish their degree compared to 45% of upper income students.

There have been several threats to TRiO’s existence, including complete cuts to the programs proposed during the Reagan administration and later, during the second Bush administration. Nonetheless, TRiO has continued to grow and develop, adding new programs, such as Veteran’s Upward Bound until there were actually seven programs operating under the TRiO umbrella. It makes the TRiO name seem less applicable, but it has become their brand.

Over the years, the TRiO Programs have been expanded and improved to provide a wider range of services and to reach more students who need assistance. One of the key changes to TRiO came in 1980 when the programs expanded from serving only low income students to also serving first generation students—those whose parents did not have a college degree. This allowed the programs to serve more working class students. Adding first generation students was important because it moved the programs in a more inclusive direction toward looking at the origin and the impact of non-financial barriers to access and success in postsecondary education. And politically, it enabled the TRiO program to build a broader coalition in Congress, a coalition not just of poor people, but a constituency of all those who had not had opportunities for postsecondary education.

Today, more than 2,900 TRIO projects currently serve more than 840,000 low-income Americans. Much like Head Start, program advocates estimate that TRiO is only able to reach a fraction of eligible participants, and would certainly benefit from expansion rather than cuts.

The Coalition on Human Needs has combed through the Ryan Budget proposal to look for proposed cuts across a range of social programs, including those with less name recognition. Not surprisingly, they found that Ryan and his fellow Republicans have proposed slashing funding to TRiO programs right alongside Head Start and every other program that assists the poor or other vulnerable populations. One of the disadvantages for smaller, less well-known programs like TRiO is that they don’t have a large number of citizen lobbyists to advocate on behalf of the program when budget negotiations take place. Program advocates appreciate any awareness of the programs that people can raise and a willingness to write legislators to ask that TRiO not receiving funding cuts is no doubt highly valued.