

POINT OF VIEW | STATE BUDGET CUTS WILL IMPACT LIVES

Let's find solutions for proposed cuts

BY MARY BRINKLEY

This legislative session, our legislators must deal with one of the worst budget shortfalls in the history of our state. As they begin the appropriations process for fiscal year 2011, they are facing a shortfall of \$750 million after using federal stimulus funds



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and the allowable rainy day funds. For fiscal 2012, the budget shortfall will be another \$823 million.

Because of Oklahoma's constitutional requirement to maintain a balanced budget, severe cuts will be made to all state agencies. Beginning July 1, cuts to agencies, including those serving the elderly, disabled and children, will be enormous and directly impact lives.

The Oklahoma Health Care Authority is projected to have \$94 million less in revenue for fiscal 2011. This will require \$255 million in cuts meaning 17,000 direct jobs affected, a loss of \$382 million in income, and 9,900 indirect jobs impacted with an income loss of \$217 million.

To date the OHCA has already cut \$110 million, and has lost the ability to leverage \$255 million in federal stimulus funds. The agency is proposing cutting "optional" benefits including dialysis, pharmacy, dental, durable medical equipment such as oxygen, and eye care. Some cuts will cost the state more in hospital expenses. Provider rates would be cut 19 percent. As a result, physicians, nursing homes and pharmacies will leave the Medicaid program or be closed.

Cuts of 18.3 percent to balance the budget for the Department of Human Services in fiscal 2011 would mean 297,530 fewer home-delivered meals, 364,301 fewer congregate meals served, 327 fewer participants to be served in adult day services (a reduction of nearly 25 percent), and 7,150 fewer individuals to be served in the ADvantage waiver program that has a current enrollment of approximately



Elderly people will be affected by budget cuts to the Department of Human Services, including fewer home-delivered meals and fewer participants in adult day services.

AP FILE PHOTO

22,000.

These cuts to DHS would mean a loss of \$79 million in federal food stamp funds, meaning 105,000 Oklahomans would not get food from the program at a time when the projections show an increase in demand of 10.2 percent.

These cuts will have long-term effects that will cripple our ability to recover from this economic crisis.

Some say "no new taxes" and that government spending must be cut back. The budget issues cannot be solved by deep cuts to all agencies. The budget problems didn't happen overnight and can't be solved overnight. We must implement short-term, stop-gap measures to ensure that critical programs, services and lives will not be compromised.

We need leaders willing to lead. Oklahomans can rise to the challenge and find solutions or accept the proposed cuts and surely we will fail.

Brinkley is executive director of the Oklahoma Association of Homes and Services for the Aging.