



Trump's Budget to Preserve the Swamp?

President Donald Trump's first budget proposal is finally out, and it boldly promises to deliver a "new foundation for American greatness." I guess that grandiose language is supposed to resonate with those voters who don't understand how the budget process actually works. The sad reality is that this budget would accomplish no such thing, for several reasons:



First, notice that I said "would," not "will." That's because the proposal is dead on arrival on Capitol Hill. Even if one believed the Trump budget would be successful in achieving its stated aims, congressional Republicans have made clear that they won't be carrying the administration's water. Specifically, GOPers have already made clear that they have zero appetite for pursuing the spending cuts and program terminations recommended in the administration's budget proposal.

Surprised? You shouldn't be. Republicans have had many opportunities over the years to ax such budget zombies as the National Endowment for the Arts, Corporation for Public Broadcasting subsidies and the Economic Development Administration. They're not going to finally go to war for those spending cuts now.

Other reforms will most likely be met with wobbly knees from congressional Republicans, too. For example, the administration wants to strengthen work requirements for able-bodied people using federal welfare programs. That should be a no-brainer, but with Democrats and their media allies ready to pounce, don't expect the GOP to put up much of a fight. The budget also proposes reforms to Medicaid that would reduce the growth in the program's ballooning costs. On top of that, studies have shown that Medicaid beneficiaries don't experience better health outcomes than uninsured people. Will congressional Republicans fight for these reforms when GOP governors start complaining about having to assume greater responsibility for the joint federal-state program? If the Obamacare reform debacle is our guide, the answer is no.

Second, although the administration's proposal contains many good ideas, it also contains the sort of budget gimmicks that have turned previous presidential budget proposals into punching bags. It claims it could balance the budget in 10 years, using rosy estimates of growth and revenue alongside a continued abuse of the budget for "overseas contingency operations," which is stuffed with \$77 billion in extra spending. As Taxpayers for Common Sense notes, if the fund for overseas contingency operations were an agency, it would be the fourth-largest in terms of federal discretionary spending. There are other problems with this budget, too. Though its designers are willing to ax



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counterproductive low-income programs, they won't tackle programs that serve wealthier Americans, such as Medicare and Social Security. In fact, though the budget would cut Medicaid, it might even prop up Medicare, as Reason's Peter Suderman explains in a piece about the budget. It's not OK that seniors, who are overly represented in the top income quintile, require younger and poorer Americans to transfer massive amounts of money to them through these insolvent programs.

It also would add billions to the already bloated defense budget, bringing it up to \$668 billion. That would be \$22 billion above the current level. Even though the proposal acknowledges the approximately 20 percent excess capacity spread across the military departments — that, if eliminated, could save \$2 billion over 10 years — it fails to tackle the \$125 billion of waste in the Pentagon that the president decried on the campaign trail. It renews a commitment to unworkable weapons systems and a shadow army of defense contractors.

It also caves to Ivanka Trump and would implement a paid family leave program, and it falls for the fallacy that the federal government is the best entity to pay for and implement infrastructure improvements.

That being said, the biggest problem with this budget is the fact that I can't see President Trump actually fighting for it. Sure, he'll continue to make speeches about his great wall and his anti-immigration positions with the passion that got him elected, but don't count on him to go to the mat for work requirements, Medicaid reforms and a reduction in the food stamp rolls.

This is bad news for those of us who want to see good reforms implemented, but it's good news for the swamp — which will most likely get to rule the day once again.

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