

Features

Budget cuts to affect middle income students

United Press International
WASHINGTON — Ronald Reagan's proposed cuts in aid to college students are going to be felt mostly by the traditionally Democratic middle-income and working class Americans who were a key to his winning the White House.

Reagan is cutting federal aid to higher education as part of his plan to trim almost \$50 billion next year. The programs getting axed are the ones that have made a col-

lege education an accepted norm for most middle-class families and many in the lower-middle-class. The president would make it more difficult for children of middle-income families to get federally subsidized low-interest loans, a program that has grown out of control because anyone — even the wealthy — may participate. Many upper-income families have taken out the loans and used them for investments.

Eligibility for grants, which go to lower-income children, would be tightened also, but nowhere as much as the loans, the administration says. Also, there will be added emphasis on collecting the hundreds of millions of dollars in defaulted payments owned the government.

Meanwhile, while Congress decides what to do about Reagan's budget proposals, the administration has ordered a halt to processing grant application for next year.

The budget squeeze essentially pits the grant program, which helps mostly low-income stu-

ents, against the loan program, which is of more help to the middle class. Somewhat overlooked in the battle over the loan and grant programs is the fate of Social Security payments to full-time students age 18-22. Even Stafford, who is one of higher education's Capitol Hill patrons, says student Social Security benefits "probably will be eliminated."

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The poor will bear some of the burden of the higher education cuts, but the heavy load will be carried by middle- and lower-middle-class families who have come to depend on federal aid for sending their children to college.

long-run the drop they see coming in the number of students will mean fewer highly trained people in the economy. "Students must not be the sacrificial lambs of the budget-cutting process," says Rep. Peter Peyser, D-N.Y. "It is not only the poor, but the middle-income families and their children who desperately need this continuing help."

But college administrators, students, and sympathetic members of Congress claim the changes will drive hundreds of thousands of people from college for lack of money and may force some small private schools out of business. "This will not drive millions of students away from higher education," Bell insists, but he concedes it will change the status quo for huge numbers of them.

College lobbyists say up to 750,000 students could be forced to drop out of school. Sixty percent of college students depend on

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carried by middle- and lower-middle-class families who have come to depend on federal aid for sending their children to college. Ironically, it was such voters, disgruntled with big government and angered by inflation that forced them into higher tax brackets, who provided Reagan with much of the traditionally Democratic support he needed to be elected.

Reagan would also eliminate the provision that allows anyone to borrow up to \$2,500 annually — whether or not they need it.

Critics of the federal program point to the more than \$1 billion in defaulted loans outstanding.

Critics of the Reagan plan, like Sen. Claiborne Pell, D-R.I., say cutting college aid is "penny-wise and pound foolish" because in the long run the drop they see coming in the number of students will mean fewer highly trained people in the economy.

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