

Medicare cuts mean higher local taxes

This interview with Donald Hume, a Democratic state representative from southern Indiana, was conducted by Marianna Wertz on Oct. 19.

EIR: The Republican version of the Medicare cuts will probably pass shortly in Congress. President Clinton has threatened to veto it. You are involved in a fight to prevent the shutdown of at least two rural hospitals in your district. What do you have to say about this issue?

Hume: The only thing I can say on this is that I hope that our congressman in the 8th District [John N. Hostettler, R] definitely does vote against it. I hope that he sees fit to vote against it, because it will be quite a blow to the rural hospitals, even though they have made some adjustments. So many of them are running right on the line or in the red, and they're doing a lot of charity work right now.

EIR: Is there a threat of shutting down two of the rural hospitals there?

Hume: There's always that threat, even in good times, and if you take away what they have now, it's going to make it worse than ever.

EIR: And that's what would happen under the Republican plan?

Hume: I think it would.

EIR: Have you talked to the congressman about it?

Hume: I've called down to his office but I haven't gotten any response.

EIR: Have you heard from your constituents and how they feel about what's going on there?

Hume: Yes. They're not at all happy about the whole Republican plan. A lot of people realize that if we don't take care of the indigent as a nation, then it falls back onto the locals in the form of poor relief, and then that goes directly onto the property tax rolls. And property taxes are not popular as it is, they're much too high.

EIR: So, it's just passing the buck.

Hume: Yes. Lindell [Sen. Lindell Hume, his brother] and I have been trying to get less property taxes, and instead of that, it seems like on a state level we have a Republican-led House and Senate both, and they seem to be pushing welfare-type cuts down to where it will be forced onto the property taxes.

I think that people are tired of too much government, but when they look at some of the things that the Republicans are doing, shifting the load from the rich more to the poor, I think they realize that it's not altogether just too much government, but it's what kind of government.

integral part of the University of Washington's educational, training, and research programs. The School of Medicine, with Harborview being one of its primary focuses, maintains one of the largest National Institutes of Health-supported research programs.

The impact of the proposed . . . cuts [\$185 million over seven years] on Harborview will be devastating. . . . It is not by chance that we must depend on Medicaid and Medicare to provide many of the services needed by our patients. Trauma and burns for instance, are not limited to people with insurance, and they are not personal choice. They are the result of accidents—a car running a stop light, a boiler in a ship exploding. The proposed cuts will severely limit our ability to provide these services.

The impact of these reductions is exacerbated by the disproportionate cuts being proposed for medical education. The primary purpose of our residency programs are education and training. Nonetheless, Harborview's ability to provide Level 1 trauma services depends on having advanced house staff available 24 hours a day in the hospital. A substantial part of the cost of those staff is paid by Medicare. Also, the indirect part of medical education payments reimburses us

for our disproportionate percentage of services provided to sicker and poorer patients.

Harborview's problems, and those of many providers of basic services, cannot be solved by caring only for those with insurance. . . . Our hospital is full, so we cannot just increase our volume. . . .

Our community . . . [and] Washington State [have] been supportive of Harborview, recognizing the critical regional role we play. Washington State, however, cannot pick up the slack . . . from cuts in federal funding.

Gerald E. Thomson, MD, president of the American College of Physicians, the nation's largest medical specialty society, testimony before the Senate Democratic leadership, Oct. 5.

"Neither Medicare patients nor the health delivery system can absorb the magnitude of the budget cuts proposed. We do not believe that the health care system can absorb the loss of half a trillion dollars in public spending in the next seven years," Thomson said. He was critical of cuts to teaching centers that "play a unique and precious role in developing and delivering high-technology medicine," and pointed out