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Seniors object to governor's proposed cuts

Kitzhaber's plan would divert money from senior services to child development program



"That's dirty. How does he think we'll get along if he cuts our health services?"

Jean Turner,
on Kitzhaber's proposed cuts to
Project Independence

Jean Turner says goodbye Thursday to Vi Cornett, a housekeeper, below, provided by Oregon Project Independence. Because of a heart condition Turner can't do her own cleaning.

Damian Mulnix/News-Register



By NICOLE MONTESANO
Of the News-Register

Jean Turner suffered a heart attack in 1989, and later had to undergo angioplasty.

Her doctor told her she had to cut out housework to save her heart. No vacuuming, no sweeping, no dusting, he said.

She tried to do some of it anyway, but decided he was right. She wasn't up to it.

"I can't do that," she said. "My heart won't allow it."

The work still has to be done, and Turner is widowed. That leaves her few options.

Right now, there's a program to help low-income seniors like her. Oregon Project Independence offers basic household assistance designed to enable seniors to remain in their homes.

Gov. John Kitzhaber proposes to eliminate the \$13.7 million program in his budget for the next biennium. He proposes to cut some

other senior programs as well, including the Medicaid long-term care program, hoping to divert the money into some children's programs he thinks hold a higher priority.

Project Independence services include housekeeping, grocery shopping, bathing assistance, medication management and the like. The program serves about 3,000 people, including 55 in Yamhill County.

It is financed mainly out of the state general fund, but clients are asked to pay something for the service if they can, based on a sliding scale.

Kitzhaber acknowledged it's tough to choose between programs for seniors and programs for children. But he said the state can't afford to put everything it would like into both areas in these tight times.

He said every dollar saved in early childhood prevention saves \$4 later in life. His Oregon Children's Plan would provide par-

ents of at-risk children with counseling and other services in an effort to head off problems before they start, he noted.

The Republican co-chairmen of the Joint Ways and Means Committee have proposed a budget that would restore close to \$7 million to Project Independence. But Democrats have accused the GOP of promising more than it can deliver.

The governor's Children First plan would provide prenatal and at-birth screening, coordination of services, in-home support, substance abuse treatment for parents and mental health treatment for children, and funding for preschool and community programs.

The governor proposes cutting \$37 million from existing programs, and allocating \$29 million in new revenue, to fund his ini-