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Panel: Medicaid cuts have not saved money

Former state economist, Boise police sergeant say they only shift costs

BOISE — Idaho's \$35 million in Medicaid cuts have not saved the state money, have eliminated thousands of jobs, put pressure on law enforcement operations and hurt individual residents, according to a panel that met Wednesday to discuss impacts of the cuts.

The panel in Boise included the state's former chief economic analyst Mike Ferguson, Boise police Sgt. David Cavanaugh, advocates for the disabled and Medicaid recipients.

Ferguson, now executive director of the Idaho Center for Fiscal Policy, estimates the cuts to Medicaid cost Idaho 4,000 jobs. He said the state's projected revenues allow for the reinstatement of much of the cuts, but lawmakers have no plans to do so.

Ferguson said 2,000 of the jobs are directly related to Medicaid services and another 2,000 are a ripple effect from money out of the economy when the 2,000 jobs were lost.

"We've cut public services worse than proved to be necessary," Ferguson said. "We're in a situation where we're in pain. The question is who bears the brunt of that pain." Idaho has \$147 million in revenue growth projected for fiscal year 2013 and a carryover of \$103 million from this fiscal year, Ferguson said. He said the state could spend part of that to reverse Medicaid and public education cuts.

Often recipients of Medicaid mental health care whose services have been cut end up in the hands of law enforcement, Cavanaugh said. And police are not trained to deal with them on more than a superficial basis. He said suicide calls have been up in Boise.

"It just rearranges where the money is spent," Cavanaugh said about Medicaid cuts. "If anyone thinks these folks are going to get better with less medication and less support, they're just deluding themselves."

Advocacy groups for Idahoans with disabilities sponsored the panel. They also presented the booklet "Medicaid Matters in Idaho: Real Stories, Real Impacts, Real Communities" that included two people from Caldwell: Kathy McNary and Retta Green.

Green, 71, is a retired truck driver who was diagnosed with colon cancer in June. She said she can barely eat without new dentures, which she can't get because of the cuts.