

SCHENECTADY

Tonko blasts House spending cuts

Agencies for poor, like SCAP, would suffer, he says

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U.S. Rep. Paul Tonko on Wednesday labeled as "immoral and unacceptable" a House-approved funding bill that cuts \$61 billion from the federal budget, including \$30 million to agencies in New York that assist the poor and unemployed.

Tonko, D-Amsterdam, made his statement at a ribbon-cutting

for the Schenectady Community Action Program's new classroom that will train local residents living in poverty for a job in the health care field. Tonko has supported community action agencies such as SCAP throughout his career in politics.

"I hope the Senate will provide a much more American-impasioned response" to dealing with the deficit, Tonko said. "I support belt-tightening, but I think it

should be done in a more thoughtful manner. These cuts will push people into poverty, and this will require community action agencies to do more with less."

A \$50,000 grant from the Wright Family Foundation helped SCAP build the classroom, which is located at 913 Albany St. SCAP will use the classroom to train approximately 400 low-income people for a variety of health care professions.

Denise Harlow, of the New York State Community Action Association, said the Republican-led House's funding bill is proposing a 50 percent cut to Community Service Block Grants, which provide funding to SCAP and other community action agencies in New York and other states.

If Congress adopts the proposal, New York's CSBG allocation for 2012 would decline to \$30 million, Harlow said. Cuts also would affect 40 percent of funding allocated to agencies in the current federal fiscal year, which began

Oct. 1.

SCAP Executive Director Deb Schimpf said SCAP would lose \$220,000 in CSBG funding out of its \$7.1 million annual budget. SCAP uses CSBG funding for crisis intervention services, such as providing emergency grants for food, shelter and medical care to approximately 4,000 low-income people per year in Schenectady County.

Schimpf said she would have to

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lay off six to eight agency people and reduce services should SCAP lose the CSBG funding. The Head Start program, which SCAP administers, would see a 20 percent service reduction, for example. The reduction translates into 45-50 fewer children in the program, which now enrolls 321 children.

Head Start provides comprehensive education, health, nutrition and parent involvement services to low-income children and their families.

Schimpf said federal budget cuts would have a ripple effect on other human service agencies in Schenectady County.

"We support the food pantries and the homeless shelters. They will see cuts as well," she said.

In the long term, Schimpf said more people will become homeless, more people will remain hungry and more people with few or no job skills will have a hard time finding employment.

Mike Saccocio, City Mission executive director, agreed with Schimpf's assessment.

"We — City Mission and SCAP — rely on each other in providing services. If SCAP says it cannot provide a block of services anymore, that means City Mission has to summon resources to

do them, and that is not always doable," he said. "We will have to make choices."

SCAP provides stopgap services that keep people from having to use services offered by the City Mission, Saccocio said. If SCAP can't provide those services anymore, then he expects to see more people at his door.

Schimpf said the timing of the federal cuts could not be worse.

"Recovery from a recession first affects people who are disenfranchised. For the disenfranchised, recovery takes longer," she said.

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