

OPINION

OUR VIEW

GOP plan would decimate CDBG

Murfreesboro's Community Development Block Grant program, which has helped 40 residents here move out of sub-standard housing since 2006, is on the federal budget chopping block.

While the Obama administration proposed a \$300 million cut to the federal program, a 75 percent reduction, the Republican Study Committee recommends a \$4.5 billion cut to the program, which would effectively decimate it.

In Murfreesboro, the CDBG works with a \$700,162 grant to help local housing. The funds are used to help those looking to buy homes with assistance for down payment and closing costs. It also aids in the rehabilitation of aging houses and provides micro-enterprise loans, such as \$10,000 to a woman starting a drop-in day care; and \$106,000 for public service projects of local nonprofit organizations, such as \$16,244 to the Primary Care & Hope Clinic to operate a satellite clinic at Franklin Heights public housing development.

Recently, the Community Development Office helped provide funding to build the 100th Habitat for Humanity home in Rutherford County.

However, 6th District U.S. Rep. Diane Black, R-Gallatin, signed a letter pledging to help eliminate the Community Development Block Grants. Murfreesboro is the only city in Black's district that receives CDBG from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

In response to Black's pledge, director of Community Development John Callow hand-delivered a letter signed by Murfreesboro Mayor Tommy Bragg to Black's West Main Street office last month.

"Because of CDBG and the HOME funds Murfreesboro receives through the Tennessee Housing Development Agency, more than 40 of our constituents are no longer living in houses that do not meet minimum standards," Bragg's letter states. "Work on all these projects was awarded by public bid to private-sector contractors who have used CDBG funds to pay wages and purchase goods and services in the community."

Black's answer was a statement saying:

"Many programs are of value, but because the government has continually spent more than it takes in, the United States is facing unsustainable deficits and a massive national debt," Black said. "Tough decisions will have to be made in order to get our finances back on track. No one said it would be easy, but cutting government spending is necessary to ensure this country grows and prospers once again."

While we applaud Black for his fiscal responsibility, we are concerned that this particular cut could cost taxpayers more in the long run, especially in an economy that is resulting in so many forced out of their homes.

Allowing families to subsist in sub-standard housing can result in health and educational problems as children grow up around lead paint, asbestos and inadequate plumbing, lack of heating and cooling, and poor insulation. This, of course, leads to extra costs for special education and health care.

And the construction brought about with these grants also puts people to work.

"That's a lot of money that won't be circulating back through the local economy," Callow said.

We urge Black to rethink her stance on this issue. It would be a big step backward for our city.

Opinions in this space reflect a consensus of the discussion by The Daily News Journal's Editorial Board.