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Budget scalpel blunted as book detailing program trims is cut

By: Stephen Dinan – April 10, 2013

President Obama's new budget is slimmer in one major way he left out the details of the specific spending cuts he wants Congress to make.

During his first four years in office, whenever he submitted a budget, Mr. Obama included a full 200-page volume detailing dozens of specific programs he wanted to see trimmed or eliminated altogether. It was the tip of the "scalpel" Mr. Obama had vowed to bring to the budget.

But his latest budget, sent to Congress on Wednesday, scraps the book of cuts and replaces it with a slim, seven-page chart.

"This year the document itself is substantially cut and consolidated," Taxpayers for Common Sense said in a blog posting analyzing the budget.

The White House budget office didn't return messages asking about the decision to eliminate details of his proposed cuts.

Overall, Mr. Obama's budget calls for cutting about \$16 billion in specific programs in 2014, and trimming another \$4 billion for a total of about \$20 billion.

The cuts range from ending the military's C-27 Joint Cargo Aircraft program and reducing low-income energy assistance, at about a half a billion dollars each, down to less than \$1 million from cutting the Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation.

And Mr. Obama challenges some popular spending, including the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program, which sends money to states and localities to pay them for holding immigrants who have committed crimes in their jails and prisons.

The states say it's a federal obligation because the government should do a better job of policing the borders, but the administration said the \$240 million was a necessary casualty of tight budgets.

"Since [the program] has shown only limited effectiveness in addressing the problems surrounding illegal immigration and criminal aliens, the administration prefers to focus the limited funding available for criminal justice assistance programs that seek efficiencies or promote national strategy," a Justice Department official said.

Mr. Obama actually had some success early in his first term in pushing Congress to accept his proposed cuts.

A Washington Times analysis in 2010 found that he had won a higher percentage of his proposed cuts than President George W. Bush had.

But more recently his progress faltered as he and Congress butted heads over spending, leaving the government running on continuing resolutions that generally extended the previous year's funding.

Tad DeHaven, a budget analyst at the Cato Institute, said even if Congress agreed to the cuts, they are too small to make much of an impact on a federal government that will spend \$3.8 trillion next year.

"The sad part is that Congress won't even agree to a lot of the president's proposed cuts," he said.

Indeed, just last month Sen. Tom Coburn, Oklahoma Republican, asked the Senate to enact \$8 million in cuts from National Heritage Areas a trim Mr. Obama proposed last year and again this year.

Mr. Coburn wanted to take that money and use part of it to reopen the White House to public tours. But the Senate rejected his bid, with lawmakers saying they didn't want to lose the money going to historic sites in their home states.