

Officials: 2009 budget includes deep cuts

by UPI

WASHINGTON - White House and congressional officials said the Bush administration's budget for fiscal 2009 will include a virtual freeze on domestic spending programs. The officials said the \$3 trillion budget, expected to be released Monday, will also seek to take billions of dollars away from federal health programs to help the White House reach its goal of balancing the budget by 2012, The Washington Post reported Friday. However, some programs will apparently be immune to the spending cuts, as U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff said Thursday that President George Bush will push to increase border security and border enforcement funding by 19 percent, including \$2 billion earmarked for border fencing, vehicle barriers and detection technologies. He said the funding increase would also include \$442.4 million to expand the Border Patrol by 2,200 agents. Senate aides told the Post the expected cuts to congressional discretionary spending -- aimed at keeping the spending to less than \$1 trillion for 2009 -- would result in severe reductions of education and law enforcement grants for state and local governments. They said first responder grants would be cut by nearly 50 percent. A White House official said the growth of federal healthcare entitlements would be cut by \$208 billion over five years, including a \$170 billion Medicare cut.

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