

# THE BUFFALO NEWS

June 4, 2021

## Biden budget promises big boost for WNY - and a big U.S. deficit

*\$6 trillion spending plan increases funds for Great Lakes restoration, social programs, medical research and more, but would set a debt record*



Derek Gee/News file photo

**Flood control:** There's money to help complete the breakwater in Buffalo Harbor, which is key to preventing local flooding.



John Hickey/News file photo

**Environmental protection:** There's a boost in funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative to \$340 million.



Derek Gee/News file photo

**Social programs:** Budget proposes an increase in funding for low-income heating aid, social programs and food stamps.



John Hickey/News file photo

**Other items:** More funding for West Valley Demonstration project, but no new construction funds for Falls air station.

BY JERRY ZREMSKI  
NEWS WASHINGTON BUREAU CHIEF

You want flood protection for downtown Buffalo, and maybe shorelines along Lake Ontario as well? You got it. You want more money for clean-water efforts? It's there, too, in the 72-page pending plan and the 1,422-page appendix that Biden dropped into lawmakers' in-boxes last week.

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You want more money for social programs and community development? Well, Biden will give you more – even for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, which presidents of both parties have been trying to slash for decades.

You want more money for medical research and education? It's all there in the \$6 trillion Biden spending plan for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1, which Congress must approve.

Then again, if you want tax cuts and a balanced budget, Biden's spending plan is the wrong place to look. His budget proposes hiking the corporate tax rate from 21% to 28%, increasing capital gains taxes and raising the top tax rate for the wealthy from 37% to 39.6%. Meanwhile, the federal deficit would balloon to a one-year record of \$3.7 trillion.

Not surprisingly, then, Republicans like Rep. Chris Jacobs of Orchard Park detest Biden's offering.

"This president has taken reckless spending to unimaginable heights," Jacobs, a member of the House Budget Committee, said in a statement.

But Rep. Brian Higgins, a Buffalo Democrat and also a Budget Committee member, said the spending plan is a down payment on Biden's vision for rebuilding the nation - and a big-time boost for Buffalo.

"This is all infrastructure," he said. "It creates jobs."

## Flood prevention

Biden's plan would go a long way toward completing a piece of infrastructure that's critically important to Buffalo: the breakwater that protects downtown from Lake Erie's most ferocious waves.

The Army Corps of Engineers previously received \$11.9 million to begin work on rebuilding that breakwater, which suffered catastrophic storm damage in October 2019. Biden's budget would set aside another \$20.9 million for projects in Buffalo Harbor - enough to maybe even complete the rebuilt breakwater.

"It's a large amount of money, and would it get us most of the way there? Absolutely," said Army Corps spokesman Andrew Kornacki.

Work on rebuilding the breakwater has begun and would continue through 2022 if Congress sets aside the money. And that's good news to residents of Waterfront Village, who, according to Higgins' office, experienced flooding three times last year.

Biden's budget would also set aside \$500,000 for a Great Lakes Resiliency Study, which aims to identify the most vulnerable coastal areas and propose solutions to help them withstand flooding. That plan could be especially helpful to residents of the Lake Ontario shoreline who have experienced flooding on several occasions in recent years.

Biden's budget also includes \$10.6 million for improvements to Black Rock Channel and \$680,000 for Dunkirk Harbor.

## Environmental efforts

Biden's budget would also do plenty to clean up the Great Lakes and the cities that surround them.

Spending for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative – which turned the Buffalo River from industrial wasteland to an active waterfront – would increase from \$330 million to \$340 million.

And that's just one of the spending plan's many clean-water investments. A fund that states can tap into to improve their wastewater systems would get a \$232 million boost, as would a similar fund aimed at improving drinking water systems.

Those are the first installments of the investments that Biden has called for in his American Jobs Plan, a massive, multiyear infrastructure effort that's still being negotiated.

Together, Biden's budget and his infrastructure plan offer a historic opportunity to rebuild the nation's sewer and drinking water systems, said Brian Smith, the Buffalo-based associate executive director at Citizens Campaign for the Environment.

Noting that about 60% of Buffalo's homes are still served by lead water pipes that potentially threaten the health of homeowners, Smith said Biden's budget will begin to fix problems that will only get more expensive to fix over time. "If we continue with the status quo, we will never be able to address these needs," he said.

## Social programs

The Biden budget also boosts several social programs that are important to cities such as Buffalo that have high poverty rates, including some programs that Biden's predecessor, Donald Trump, wanted to eliminate.

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Perhaps most notably, Biden would increase funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program by 2.2%. Trump wanted to shutter the program and other presidents annually suggested cutting funding for it.

The proposed increase is important to Western New York because the energy aid program serves so many people in the region. Some 82,733 households in Erie County got basic federal aid for their heating bills in the winter of 2019-20, while 28,815 households received emergency energy assistance.

That is by no means the only social program that Biden would boost. Funding for food stamps would spike 55% under the Biden budget. The Community Development Block Grant program, which will bring \$14.1 million to Buffalo in the current fiscal year and which Trump also wanted to eliminate, would see a 7.7% funding increase. Federal housing programs would also get millions more.

Not surprisingly, the spending plan made Sharon Parrott, president of the left-leaning Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, very happy.

"Our nation faces significant challenges, which the pandemic has both worsened and laid bare," she said. "It is time for an ambitious effort to tackle them. The president's budget meets this moment and Congress should move swiftly to craft legislation that acts on this agenda."

## Other items

Like every federal budget proposal, Biden's includes an astonishing amount of detail on how the president wants to spend the taxpayers' money. Here's a grab bag of other line items of particular interest to Metro Buffalo:

- The National Institutes of Health, which funds research at the University at Buffalo and the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, would see a 10.6% funding increase.
- Several federal education programs would see major increases in funding.
- The **West Valley Demonstration Project** would see its funding hold steady at \$88 million.
- The Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station – which has received money for several construction projects in recent years – would go without any new construction funding during fiscal 2022.
- And despite Republican cries that Democrats want to “defund the police,” Biden’s spending plan would actually increase funding for the Community-Oriented Policing Services Program from \$343 million in fiscal 2021 to \$651 million in the following fiscal year.



Derek Gee/News file photo

Buffalo would benefit under President Biden's proposed \$6 trillion federal budget through increased funding for flood prevention, Great Lakes restoration, social programs, education, medical research and low-income heating assistance.

## Rich Newberg creates a love letter to Buffalo, its history and local news



Retired WIVB reporter Rich Newberg spent a year making "The Buffalo Story: History Happens Here."

News file photo

### Alan Pergament

Many people who retire from the grind of local TV news decide to spend their time playing some golf, reading books they never had time for, traveling or going to a local coffee shop to go over the day's news events with friends.

Former WIVB-TV (Channel 4) reporter Rich Newberg had other ideas.

He has spent much of his past five and a half years since retirement looking over footage of more than 70 years of local TV news coverage in hopes of convincing people how important preserving it is for posterity.

The result is the hour special "The Buffalo Story: History Happens Here," which will air at 8 p.m. June 7 on WIVB.

Channel 4 anchor Jacquie Walker and former Channel 4 photographer Tom Vetter are co-producers of a special that Newberg said has been more than a year in the works.

Newberg, 74, seems to have two goals here – using news footage to explain Buffalo's history and emphasizing his belief and that of the Buffalo Broadcasters Association of the importance of preserving archival news footage and early videotapes that are deteriorating and need to be digitized.

Newberg makes a strong case that if something isn't done, teachable moments for future generations will be gone with the footage.

Newberg and Vetter have provided Buffalo teachers with historical Channel 4 pieces they can use in their classrooms to provide a sense of the area's history, with Buffalo's role in the civil rights movement at the top of the list.

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It also is on top of the list of subjects in the hour documentary, which works as a mix of Buffalo history, television history and nostalgia.

Newberg explores the more than 70 years that TV news has been around by focusing on the civil rights movement here in the 1960s, the environmental catastrophe at Love Canal in the 1970s, the 1971 Attica Prison riot, the closing of Bethlehem Steel in the 1980s, a nuclear waste crisis that led to environmental concerns at **West Valley** in the 1980s and the Buffalo Bills' four Super Bills losses in the 1990s.

The nostalgia part comes via watching the former Channel 4 reporters and anchors who are part of Buffalo media history, including the late Bob Koop, the late Van Miller, Carol Jasen and Marie Rice.

Channel 4 made the special possible by providing the independent producers unlimited access to its historical film and video files and giving the special a prime-time slot.

“Being the pack rat that I am, I drew heavily from my own archives as well,” Newberg said.

The oddity of how often there are Western New York angles to big national and international stories is addressed, most notably with Ann Odre being shot in May of 1981 in St. Peter’s Square when she was hit by a stray bullet intended for Pope John II. The Pope also was wounded.

It is not easy summarizing more than 70 years of news in the 50 minutes – 60 minutes, minus commercials. That meant some significant events are glossed over. The Blizzard of ’77 isn’t mentioned in the preview copy of the special until it is addressed briefly in the closing credits.

While the Bills get some prominent mentions, most other memorable sporting events are ignored. For instance, the Buffalo Sabres history is barely mentioned, which prevents younger fans from knowing that once upon a time they were a pretty good team.

Newberg also wishes he had more time to devote to the situation at **West Valley**.

But all in all, he is pleased with what could be viewed as his love letter to his adopted Western New York.

“I have a love and affinity for my adopted city,” said Newberg, a native of Long Island. “I wanted to give back in telling the Buffalo story. It is a story about the resilience of people and overcoming adversity and in the process gives the nation and the world inspiration to apply the lessons we’ve learned to help others.”

“I am grateful for having been given the opportunity to chase the Buffalo story wherever it took us, sometimes to far corners of the earth!”

The pitch to preserve film also is an important part of the Buffalo story.

“The main mission of ‘The Buffalo Story’ is to illustrate the value of rescuing our moving image history,” Newberg said. “If we let the precious news film and videotape die on the shelf, we lose a piece of ourselves. It is a costly process to digitize this material and the Buffalo Broadcasters Association needs all the help it can get to bring our greatest stories back to life.”

From watching this special, many viewers undoubtedly will realize in the long run that the cost of losing video history is far greater than the cost of preserving it.