



Election 2006: Backers say funding is available for health and social services.

By **JOSIE HUANG**
Staff Writer

Thousands of low-income Mainers could lose health care coverage, Portland's elderly could be asked to leave the Barron Center and nonprofit organizations that help the state's

most vulnerable residents could face major deficits.

That's what health and social service agency officials predict for Maine's health care system if voters approve Question 1 on the Nov. 7 state ballot. Also known as the Taxpayer Bill of Rights, the referendum question proposes limits on government spending increases.

"TABOR," said Doug Gardner, director of Portland's Health

and Human Services Department, "sounds like it would be a nightmare."

But the initiative's sponsors say such alarm is over the top. TABOR, they say, simply tries to keep state, county and town spending increases to the rate of inflation plus population change.

Worst-case scenarios, TABOR supporters point out, don't acknowledge that residents could

override the law's limits or that a rainy day fund is available.

Should health care be a priority, then elections and voters can make sure they receive adequate funding. Tarren Bragdon, health policy analyst at the Maine Policy Center. The center led the ballot question. Bragdon added that it would not be a bad thing

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