

Let's Have a More Clear Vision

By Hap Hansen

In every election year, politicians with visions discuss the problems of, and the solutions to, 'entitlement' programs. Obviously, entitlements are of great concern to politicians, so it follows that they should be of greater concern to us. What are entitlements anyway? Why is everyone concerned about them? The first and best entitlement vision was Social Security. It was initially established in 1935 and over the years has helped millions of retired Americans maintain their dignity and their economic equilibrium. As I remember reading, the first retirement check amount was \$10. Social Security was never meant to provide for 100% of a retiree's expenses. It was rather a supplement to help keep retirees off of the welfare rolls. Thirty years later, Medicare and Medicaid were envisioned and established to provide basic medical needs for those over age 65. Millions of Americans make retirement plans built around what they consider to be an undeniable and inalienable right; guaranteed health care. Some think it should be free. Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid make up more than half of the entitlement programs.

Other programs include federal and military retirement, welfare, food stamps and other income assistance, unemployment compensation, farm price supports and tuition assistance. All entitlements combined account for nearly three-quarters of total federal spending. The big problem is, entitlements are growing at a faster rate than other federal expenditures, driven mostly by accelerated health care costs. Additionally, in a recent news story, it was reported that by the early 2030's, Social Security recipients will receive a 25% reduction in their payments. That will probably not affect some of us here, but it will be a major problem for our children and grandchildren as they contemplate retirement. What kind of vision will it take to tackle rapidly rising entitlement expenditures? Should we cut social Security now? That's not acceptable. Should we cut Medicare and Medicaid? That's not acceptable. How about cutting the other entitlement programs? That's not acceptable either. Can't cut. Can't afford. What do we do? Let's look at a different kind of vision for politicians to discuss. A start at solving the problem might be to develop a public and private business partnership, with massive investment from both the government and the private business sector to create industries and jobs.

Industries that would pay corporate income taxes, hiring individuals who would pay personal income taxes. Let's have a more clear vision. Let's don't cut. Let's build.