



# The Examiner

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## EDITORIAL

# A SAFE way through the entitlement crisis

### AGREE? DISAGREE?

Congress should establish a BRAC-like commission to trim entitlement spending. Send your comments to [threads@dcexaminer.com](mailto:threads@dcexaminer.com).

**R**unaway entitlement spending is America's most pressing domestic problem. Economists from across the political spectrum have repeatedly warned that if something is not done soon, the United States faces financial disaster, with \$61 trillion in unfunded benefits coming due for millions of baby boomers who start retiring in 2008. The Congressional Budget Office says that without reform, federal taxes and entitlement-benefit spending will in the not-too-distant future reach unsustainable levels, eventually dumping a crushing \$485,000 debt load onto the backs of each and every American worker.

Not only did Congress and the Bush administration ignore this looming financial tsunami for the past six years, they made the problem immeasurably worse by adding a Medicare prescription drug benefit.

Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va., and Sen. George Voinovich, R-Ohio, have introduced legislation to establish a bipartisan commission, modeled

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on the Base Realignment and Closure commission, as a way to come to grips with entitlement spending, which now consumes 60 percent of the federal budget. Wolf and Voinovich call their panel SAFE, the Securing America's Future Economy commission. Using an approach similar to the one BRAC uses when it evaluates military bases, SAFE would assess the hard facts about Social Security, Medicaid and Medicare, and recommend a long-term strategy to preserve a basic benefit safety net, while preserving the health of the nation's economy.

Wolf described in recent testimony before the House Budget Committee what he correctly called "a financial crisis like none other in our history." He warned fellow House members that without reform, mandatory entitlement spending — which is already starting to crowd out other priorities — will contin-

ue to swallow ever larger chunks of the federal budget. "Unfortunately, I believe neither the Congress nor the president has the political will to make the tough choices to keep our nation from falling off the financial precipice," he told his congressional colleagues.

The aptly named SAFE commission would provide cover for politicians of both parties who promised the moon to get elected and now expect future generations of taxpayers to pay off their campaign pledges. The SAFE commission would let the politicians duck responsibility and blame the pain of fixing the problem on the commission's take-it-or-leave-it bottom line. It's shameful that our elected representatives can't do the hard business of governing, but if a commission is needed to give them backbone, so be it. After all, this critical problem is not going to go away by itself.