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EDITORIAL

Politicians still ignoring the entitlement tsunami

When is Congress going to get serious? After an acrimonious exchange in the House Appropriations Committee last week, an amendment to set up a bipartisan Securing America's Future Economy Commission to deal with runaway entitlement spending was defeated by just one vote.

Similar to the Base Realignment and Closure Commission that has so effectively handled the issue of excess Defense Department facilities, SAFE would make specific recommendations for the long-term shoring up of Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. Like the BRAC recommendations, Congress would only get to vote the entire SAFE package up or down.

The SAFE concept, championed by Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va., and Rep. Jim Cooper, D-Tenn., is also supported by Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke, who warns that mandated entitlement spending will only drive the federal deficit higher. Congress will soon have virtually no discretionary funds to spend, because en-

Agree? Disagree?

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itlements already consume 60 percent of the federal budget and will explode as the baby boomers retire in coming years.

SAFE's razor-thin defeat in committee was disheartening, but the 32-31 margin should also be seen as a hopeful sign that more congressmen, notably including some Blue Dog Democrats, realize they must act now to prevent the tsunami of expanding entitlement spending that will put every American household under the equivalent of a \$455,000 mortgage — with all payments and no house.

Yet Appropriations Chairman David Obey, D-Wis., was more concerned about a potential turf battle than mak-

ing progress on entitlement reform. Obey's objection to giving "outside academics [the] right to write legislation, which the Congress is just going to have to vote on" ignores the fact that Congress has had plenty of time to pass entitlement reform legislation itself.

Its failure to do anything — despite numerous warnings from economists from across the political spectrum — makes the case that only the SAFE approach has any chance of working.

There is little encouragement on this issue from the presidential campaign. An analysis by the National Taxpayers Union found that the new programs proposed by Barack Obama would increase federal spending by \$343.6 billion, while John McCain's would push expenditures up by \$68.5 billion.

Both are essentially ignoring the entitlement crisis. Instead of adding to the spending burden by proposing new federal programs, Obama and McCain should get on board the SAFE bus.