

From:
The Stuart News
Stuart, Florida
April 22, 1985

Why spending isn't cut

The Census Bureau reports that 47 percent of all households in America receive payments or other benefits from federal programs — which underlines one reason it is so painfully difficult to reduce government spending.

The government assistance received by just under 40 percent of those households requires no demonstration of financial need, meaning, of course, that a great deal of the money goes to Americans of middle-incomes or better.

There are some controversial programs in this category — those dispensing money so middle-class college students can attend expensive private schools — but there are also programs whose usefulness most Americans have come to take for granted, such as Medicare and Social Security.

“With almost half of the households getting some kind of benefits from the government, if you reduce spending levels, you affect a lot of people,” a Census Bureau official who supervised the study said recently. “There are a lot of constituents out there.”

Many of those constituents, understandably, have joined forces to become enormously powerful lobbying groups.

Twenty-eight percent of all households receive Social Security benefits, but it is still a bit of a surprise to see the 35 million-member coalition that has been formed to fight cuts in cost-of-living increases in Social Security.

Such massive unified efforts are more than enough to make people on Capitol Hill take notice, and indeed they have noticed.

Americans, for better or for worse depending on one's point of view, have not only become accustomed to government services, benefits, and subsidies, but also are more than ready to resist serious efforts to reduce them.

This, as much as anything, accounts for the extreme difficulty of building constituencies for cuts in government spending — and therefore making real progress toward shrinking our nation's alarming budget deficit.

Village Advertiser Commentary

Social Security recipients are among those being criticized for closing ranks to resist White House plans to reduce federal deficits through cuts in cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs). A look at the past 20 years illustrates why older people resist reductions in COLAs. Inflation's toll of more than 300% during those two decades means that had no COLAs been provided, recipients now drawing \$900 a month in benefits would be receiving only \$300. Little wonder they look back and tremble to face the future without protection from inflation.