

Jan. 29, 2008
Progressive Ponderings
“Entitlements” – Part 1

This past Saturday I attended an event at which the administrator of our County Health Department and a Doctor versed in community health spoke regarding our health care crisis. Rising costs due to our life styles and changes that influence costs were the basic subject matter. Neither spoke to the controversial issues of universal coverage, single payer, private vs. public. After their informative speeches we broke into discussion groups, each table with a state representative or state senator. My table included a “right-wing blood-type” person who ranted on how sick he was of “entitlements” although the subject had not been mentioned that morning. This blood-type always describes entitlements as going to unworthy, irresponsible, lazy, illegal human objects.

I couldn't get this rant off my mind. Our government, any government, is beseeched by its citizens to issue “entitlements” to selected petitioners. When issued to the disenfranchised of society we use the term negatively and call it socialism. But when monetary favors are issued to the wealthy and business persons, “entitlements” are incentives, promotion, research.

The largest “entitlement” is one that President Eisenhower warned us about just before he left office – the military/ industrial complex. The “entitlements” of the war machine have the backing of most of our politicians and enable the presidents from each party to deceive us into war. In addition to no-bid benefits to the military industrial rip-off, the strongest military in the history of the world is on call to protect corporate assets and enforce trade agreements against the exploited people of the world. Other “entitlements” flow to the corporate and wealthy elite as the military limits or denies access to world resources. Wars also provide the benefit of unchecked corruption to politicians and business people alike.

Domestic security forces – the National Guard and state and local policing units – have always taken the side of property when conflict arises between business and labor. Asset protection, rather than people's safety has been the normal use of domestic security which constitutes another business “entitlement.”

The United States is the largest contributor of funds to the World Bank and the IMF. When these funds are lent out to 2nd and 3rd World Countries these agreements usually contain conditions demanding that U.S. personnel be hired to lead the projects and that equipment needed for the projects be purchased from U.S. corporations. Even these world financial institutions enforce “entitlements” to corporations and the wealthy.

So-called Free Trade Agreements are completely about the corporate world. They contradict many sovereign laws and restrict the rights of people. “Entitlements” from these agreements flow exclusively to corporations. Being able to multi-locate, corporations benefit from these entitlements on a worldwide basis.

The administration of Bush/Cheney (both with big-oil backgrounds) held a secret energy conference early in its governing tenure. Who attended and what policies were decided is still secret from the public but known to its corporate attendees. We do know that most energy costs have tripled, oil and gas companies have the largest profits in history, royalties are not being paid; in spite of these obscene profits they still get tax breaks and government incentives. The administration is reluctant to support alternative sustainable resources, and carbon is choking the planet. This “entitlement” may have the most disastrous consequences of all.

Corporations are not allowed to vote but have persuaded the courts that money is speech. Money in elections is the loudest voice. For years American citizens have decried this situation but money rebukes all efforts for change. If an individual expends money in political activity no tax breaks are provided. On the other hand corporations hire lobbyists and lawyers, and pay dues to trade associations and the Chamber of Commerce. These associations and the hired help frequently engage in political activity. The corporation records this expense as normal business expense and it is deductible, a cost of doing business, an “entitlement.”

Now when “entitlements” are discussed, you can judge for yourself the intent of the words. (to be continued)
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