

Protecting the Vulnerable

Now that the revenue side of the fiscal cliff has been more or less resolved, and putting aside the debt ceiling for the time being, the focus of Congress and our nation will shift to the impending budget cuts resulting from sequestration. Along with our colleagues at Jewish Federations of North America, and other partners in Washington, AJFCA will be working in the next two months to ensure that any spending decisions do not devastate our nation's safety net.

We urge you to join us in working to educate the American public and legislators about the potential effect of spending cuts on the most vulnerable among us. Much of the work we care about and represent in our network of agencies has been framed as "entitlements," which is both inaccurate and carries a negative connotation in the current environment.

We need voices to help voters and members of Congress understand that:

- Non-defense domestic spending is more than entitlements.
- "Entitlements" is a misnomer; this is social insurance to which taxpayers have contributed.
- Even entitlements are not just for the poor---they are actually about the middle class as well.
- Entitlements are not for "other people"; they are for our parents, grandparents, members of our families and our work and social circles who are orphaned, disabled, or unable to make a livable wage.
- "Entitlements" is also a misnomer because it tends to be used by pundits and legislators to include all kinds of non-defense domestic spending, including many programs that develop human potential (e.g., education, afterschool programs) and that give people a leg up rather than having them more financially dependent on government or creating greater costs for government in the forms of institutionalization and incarceration.

The current compromise between President Obama and Congress maintains the charitable contribution tax deduction at its current level, a policy consistent with our belief that charitable giving must be encouraged, particularly in times of economic distress. Our agencies are economic generators; we create jobs and empower many of our clients to become more self-sufficient. Yes, the nonprofit sector is protecting the vulnerable, an obligation we jointly share with the American people, but it also provides almost 10% of our nation's jobs. The looming budget cuts would weaken our economy and the social fabric of the United States – please urge your representatives to remember this as they engage in the upcoming fiscal debate.