P.S. to the NEWS
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RELEASE: FEBRUARY 12, 1980

ANSWERS TO THE GLOOM-AND-DOOMERS

Among the stacks of letters I receive from readers came one recently which started off like this: "If you want to read the most intelligent comment on our present ever-increasing decadence, by all means write to: Imprimus, Hillsdale College, Hillsdale, MI 49242, and ask for 'The Continuing Promise of America' by one Jay Van Andel. YOU HAVE JUST GOT TO READ IT."

My correspondent did me, and anybody else he wrote that letter to, a favor. If you write for it, as I did, you will give yourself a welcome tonic for the malaise that afflicts so many people as a result of our leaders sounding off with such depressing predictions as, "We're running out of energy," "We face a lower standard of living," "The world is sinking between overpopulation and not enough food," and "We will continue to have high inflation and unemployment."

Van Andel hoists the flag of opportunity and optimism. He presents a vision of what a "can-do" society can achieve. He gives hope for the future instead of gloom and doom. He sets goals -- and he makes us believe that we can surpass them.

Take food. Four million free American farmers feed 220 million Americans and export a huge surplus. In the Soviet Union, 34 million farmers can't feed 250 million Russians; they must import millions of bushels of grain to keep from starving.

Take energy. Crude oil reserves in the United States have been estimated at ten years ever since we started drilling 120 years ago. But potential oil, not yet drilled and therefore not counted as "reserves," is estimated to be a 100-year supply. In addition, our oil shale deposits have a potential greater than Saudi Arabia.

Many experts, including Herman Kahn, believe that natural gas deposits are virtually unlimited. The energy problem is not supply but government meddling. Federal lands have 50% of fossil fuel potential reserves, but only produce 10% of our energy.

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Take raw materials. The total natural occurrence of most metals in the top mile of the earth's surface is estimated to be about a million times as great as present known reserves. This means the earth has enough to last a million years, not counting the riches on the ocean floor.

The doom-sayers worry about pollution consuming the earth. But higher industrialization has reduced pollution per person. A horse dragging a cart a mile emits 600 grams of solid pollutant and 300 grams of liquid, while an automobile going the same distance gives off only 6 grams of pollutant.

The colonists who settled America had only their hands, a few simple tools, and animals with which to carve their homes out of the wilderness. Productivity was not much different from what it was at the time of Christ.

But, with the vision of freedom, the colonists set in motion a free-market system that released so much human energy and inventiveness that, in 200 years, personal production increased 40 times over what it had been for the previous 10,000 years. Today, America produces 28% of the world's wealth -- not because we work harder or are smarter or have more natural resources, but because we have the machines and the capital investment that make productivity so high.

The cloud Van Andel seens in our future is not a shortage of natural resources, materials or energy, but a shortage of capital investment which alone can increase productivity and bring higher wages. Yet the policy of government is to penalize and discourage investment so rapidly that our productivity rate has declined to zero.

Government over-regulation is one of the principal causes of our shocking productivity decline. When General Motors must employ 20,000 people just to comply with government regulations, their salaries must be added to the cost of the cars, and that money is not available to be invested in more jobs.

Who is Jay Van Andel? He is one of those entrepreneurs who started from scratch, believed in the American promise, and built the multi-million dollar business called Amway. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is fortunate to have such an articulate spokesman as its current Chairman of the Board.

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