

Opinion

Who are we but slaves to the tax man?

Taxes, like death, are popularly said to be unavoidable, and, at this time of the year, they seem especially so. We are taxed on every side. We pay social security taxes, property taxes, sales taxes, liquor and gasoline taxes and the hidden tax of inflation among others. Of all the taxes we pay, however, we generally consider the federal income tax to be the most burdensome.



Brian Frederick

defense. To protect us from the nasty criminal justice and business regulations. To protect us from ignorance, they offer us public education. To protect us from our own mistakes and the ravages of chance, they provide welfare, farm subsidies and mandatory seat belt laws.

Surely we should be grateful that our leaders have been so good about supplying the public goods we desire. But we would be unrealistic to think we could get all this for free. After all, our fine politicians and bureaucrats need to eat if they are to have the strength to keep working so well for our good. Besides, nothing comes for free in life, not even our "free" public education.

In spite of all the manifest benefits, some people still have the audacity to complain about their taxes. Taxes are too high. This year the IRS will gobble up 19.2 percent of the GNP, while overall, government will consume 32 percent of the GNP. In their selfishness and greed, these people want to keep the money they earn for themselves to spend as they like rather than donating

it "voluntarily", as the IRS likes to call it, to the common good.

But high taxes are not the problem. Most of us recognize the real problem is that our government consistently spends more than it takes in. In recent years, our wise leaders have tried to cut spending and the growing budget deficits. But when it came time to cut specific programs, we wouldn't let them. "Cut every other program as much as you like, only don't cut this one essential program (which happens to benefit me)," we chimed. But every program benefited a "me", and so no effective cuts were made.

We like to blame our politicians for this failure, but that is not really fair. After all, they merely give us what we ask for. If they don't bring home the pork, we won't re-elect them. We are the ones who ask them to give us goodies from the public coffers. We are the ones who continue to ask them for more goodies like better education, better welfare and better defense.

And were we not the ones who asked for a federal income tax in the first

place? We cleverly thought we could make the wealthy pay for our desires through progressive taxation. We would get something for nothing. We continue to justify the income tax in the name of "soaking" the rich, but it is clear that the idea has backfired on us. The wealthy don't have enough money to fund our desires and usually are able to find ways of keeping us from getting our grubby paws on it anyway. Now that the middle class is getting soaked in the very trap intended for the wealthy, it is complaining about excessive taxation.

A few leftover conservatives could condemn our politicians for lacking the moral fortitude to resist the immediate demands of the mob. But this idea is outmoded and terribly elitist. We all know that the voice of the people is the voice of God and that the majority knows what is best for the nation. Consequently we elect politicians who will do exactly what the public opinion polls demand. We have no place for farsighted statesmen who will place their judgment above that of the crowd when the good of the nation requires it.

Thus, we really have no right to complain. We want what our government

does for us, but balk at the price. Unless we are willing to make deep cuts we had better prepare to dig deeper into our pockets. The budget this year exceeds one trillion dollars for the first time. Last year the IRS collected \$120 billion, nearly \$40 billion more than the year before, but its best effort will not be enough to offset the deficit. Although the interest on our more than \$2 trillion of national debt is beginning to eat alive. When foreign lenders get smart and quit floating our deficits with loans, we will have to raise taxes or start printing money, which will amount to the same thing in the long run. Either way, we pay.

As a free people, we chose the policies that have led to ever increasing budgets and taxes. Those policies have led to less than free people. No man can honestly consider himself free who depends on government for his subsistence or must pay a third of his income in taxes. Whether we like it or not, the path we have chosen. Unfortunately, extricating ourselves from this course will not be as easy as choosing. **Brian Frederick is a senior history major and a columnist for The Battalion.**

But it really should not seem so onerous. While we all have a general antipathy toward taxes that keeps us from paying them ungrudgingly, we should appreciate the federal income tax, which funds most of the benefits we seek from the government. Without the income tax, our politicians couldn't even begin to do all the nice, considerate things they do so well for us.

To protect us from all the nasty people in the world, they give us national

It has us by the throat

If you're one of those hard-line conservatives who thinks we need a stronger national defense but must get more bang for the buck, stop looking. If you're a liberal who thinks we spend too much on defense and wants to cut the fat from the Pentagon budget, forget that too. You can't get there from here, either of you.



Donald Kaul

ence fiction than a realistic weapons system. It was supposed to be able to fly low at the speed of sound, high at more than twice that; it was to carry a heavy load of heavy nuclear bombs and short-range missiles, yet have a range of 6,000 miles. It would be laden with sophisticated devices to help it avoid enemy attackers and seek out targets but it would be able to take off using less than 6,000 feet of runway.

Not much of that came to pass. The plane as finally produced bumped around a lot, making it difficult to re-fuel in the air, thereby limiting its range. Besides, all the gimcracks had made it too heavy to fly high, where the good fuel mileage is. The gizmos designed to help it avoid enemy radar didn't work. Then there were the birds and sucking them into its engines. This is a real problem for a plane that is supposed to fly long distances at treetop levels.

How could this have happened, \$28 billion for a paperweight? Easy. Forget the strategic stuff; it was sold as a jobs program. The contracts were carefully distributed to subcontractors throughout the country. Local business leaders were encouraged to lean on their congressmen. Political support for the project was constructed like a mosaic. The American people were taken into the scam — bought off, really. And the B-1 became invulnerable.

Kotz, in one of the most telling passages of the book, describes the B-1 coming off the assembly line:

"First came the forward fuselage sections, manufactured by Rockwell in Palmdale (Calif.) and at Columbus, Ohio. Next came the middle and rear fuselage, built by LTV on a \$1.5 billion subcontract in Dallas. Workers then connected the tail section, built by Martin Marietta in Baltimore. The tail landing gear built by the Cleveland Pneumatic Company in Ohio, and the nose landing gear from Menasco Corporation of Burbank, California, were then attached, along with wheels and tires from Goodrich Rubber Company of Akron, Ohio." It goes on like that for two paragraphs, listing the places where the jobs had gone — Rockford, Ill.; Seattle, Wash.; Long Island, N.Y.; Wichita, Kan. Democracy in action.

We see the same thing happening now with the "Stealth" bomber and with the Strategic Defense Initiative. We build weapons not despite their great cost but because of it. If we ever cut anything out of the defense budget, it will be the lean.

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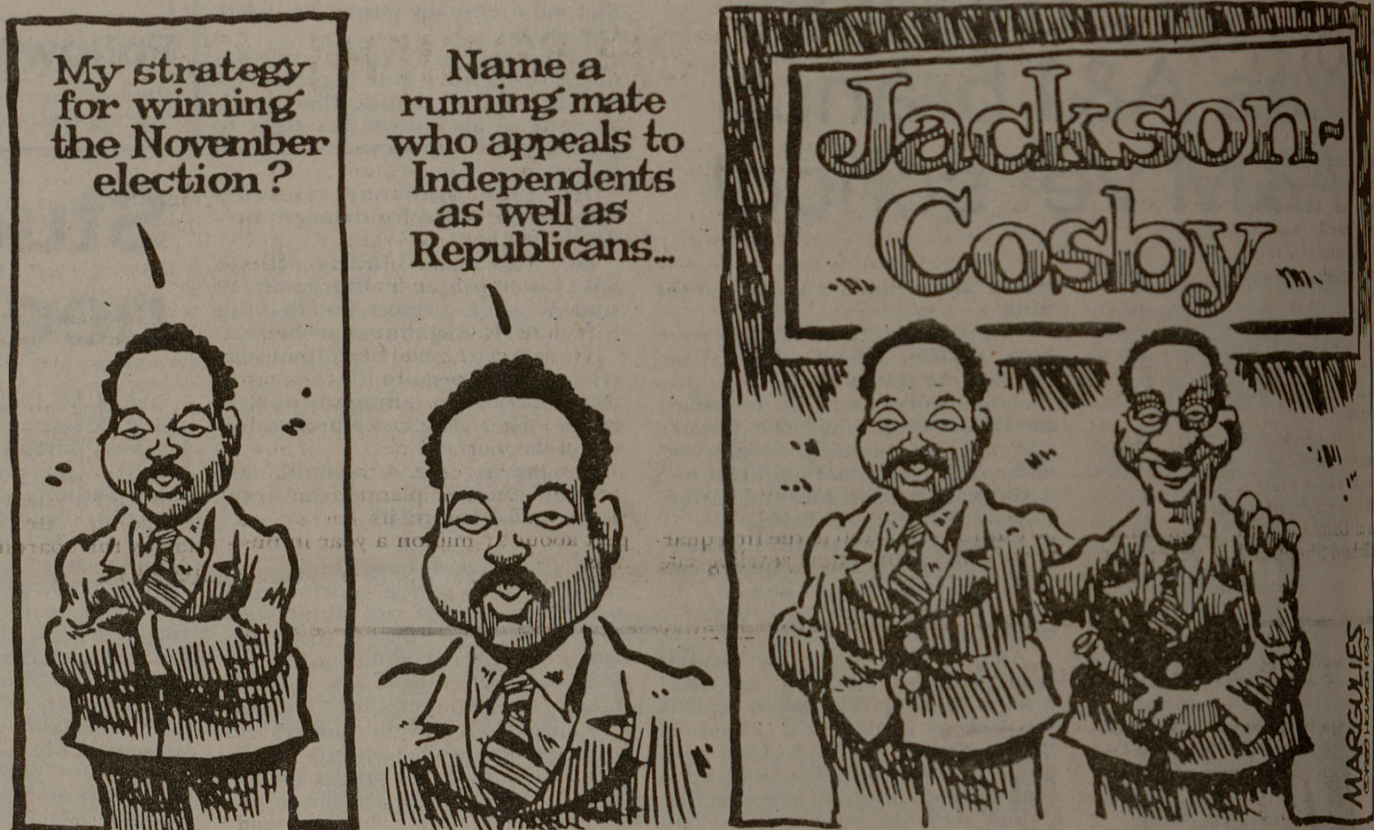
The truth is that the military-industrial complex has the country by the throat and it's not about to let go. Neither does it have to because it has a powerful ally — us, We the People of the United States.

Those are the melancholy conclusions one comes to after reading Nick Kotz's brilliant new book, "Wild Blue Yonder — Money, Politics and the B-1 Bomber" (\$19.95, Pantheon Books). It is the story of how the B-1, a turkey if there ever was one, came to be built despite the opposition of four presidents, grave doubts as to its usefulness and a price tag of \$28 billion. More than that, it is the story of how a major weapons system builds up a constituency that, at a certain point, becomes irresistible, regardless of the merits of the system. It is a sad story, but a fascinating one.

The plane began life in the '60s amid doubts about the need for a strategic bomber. If you can deliver nuclear warheads on an enemy more cheaply, more swiftly and with greater certainty with missiles, why do you need a manned bomber that can be shot down before it reaches its target? Well, bombers gave you "flexibility," countered the strategic bomber supporters. You could put them into the air on alert, safe from possible enemy first-strike, then recall them if the crisis passed. You could reroute them to secondary targets. They could do other, smaller jobs, like conventional bombing in small wars.

Not prepossessing arguments because there was still the bombers' vulnerability to enemy fire. This is where the B-1 came in. It was to be a "penetrating" bomber, one that could fly deep into Soviet territory at virtually treetop level, thus confounding enemy radar. That made it a significant improvement on the old, reliable B-52.

But as the plane's theoretical capabilities were expanded to make it more attractive, it became more the stuff of sci-



Mail Call

Perceptive Brian

EDITOR:

In a column last month, Brian Frederick discussed a significant fault line running through the academic community. This fault line separates the different attitudes of those in the sciences and in the liberal arts toward the meaning of truth in the world. The scientists have a strong feeling that there is a world out there that can be investigated and for which increasingly accurate statements can be made. This view leads to an attitude of intolerance toward those who will not accept well-determined features of nature such as the law of gravity, the conservation of energy and so on. This sense of assurance is reinforced when professors face classes filled with students from around the world who come to learn about these accepted truths. On the other hand, in the liberal arts there is no longer a generally accepted body of truth; consequently, intolerance is criticized.

I was impelled to write this letter, however, because of the fortuitous appearance of the Faculty Friends advertisement on the page facing Mr. Frederick's article. Of the 122 names in this list of Christian faculty members, 41 were from the College of Engineering while only one was from the College of Liberal Arts. Since the engineering faculty composes somewhat under 20 percent of the university faculty, the 34 percent engineering representation among the Christian faculty is striking. And, since Christianity is an intolerant religion (how else explain the missionary movement), it comprises a much more congenial system of beliefs to engineers than to those in the liberal arts.

And, this is not just a Texas A&M phenomenon. The faculty advisers for the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship chapters on some 1,000 college campuses across the country are predominantly in the disciplines of science

and engineering. Perceptive students such as Brian Frederick cannot help but recognize the different attitudes of their professors in the various academic disciplines concerning their commitments to their beliefs.

John A. McIntyre
Professor of physics

The majority versus the minority

EDITOR:

Yet, another response to a Brian Frederick article. In his article, he implied that a centralized government would legislate moral standards on the whole. Frederick suggests that this government should be decentralized while giving more power to the local government. This way "people tailor the laws under which they live to match the prevailing values of a community. Those not content with the local establishment can work to change it at that level or move on to a more congenial community."

Furthermore, a truly federal system would "reduce the threat of having the morality of the minority imposed on everyone else by a distant but powerful capital." My question is, who is going to reduce the threat of having morality of the majority imposed on the minority? Why should someone have to move just because his beliefs do not conform with everyone else in his community? My job of government is to protect the rights of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" for ALL individuals. Finally, with a powerful local government, I can only foresee vigilante "hanging mobs" for community dissenters.

Richard Bowling '88

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The Battalion

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