

Nationalism sweeps up everyone Before jumping to conclusions, remember other side

Last Saturday was just a usual summer Saturday for me. I was hard at work dismembering my motorcycle, while trying to achieve a state of mind unencumbered by thoughts of studying, the meaning of existence, rent money, or any other mundane student concerns. Things were going so very well. The rain stopped, the mosquitoes vanished, engine parts actually fit properly this time, and I could almost hear my thoughts swirling and gurgling down my brain drain.



FRANK STANFORD
Columnist

Since they were already madder-than-hell, I would guess that now they're madder-than-hell with a cherry on top. We also mustn't forget that Saddam Hussein and only a handful of politicians/military officials are responsible for Iraqi military action. Many terrorists, "West-hating" civilians, and American flag burners are exhibiting their sense of nationalism and religious solidarity, not too unlike the Irish and British animosity, Desert Storm T-shirts, or my enthusiastic arm waving at the news of the bombing in Baghdad.

Because watching television is the next best thing there is to mental Drano, I slumped down on the couch, remote in hand, to dissolve my last remaining cognitive clogs. The next thing I know, "Uncle Bill" Clinton is on the tube looking mighty somber and explaining why 23 American Tomahawk missiles were launched at Baghdad. Apparently, U.S. Intelligence discovered a plot secured by Iraqi Intelligence to assassinate George Bush last April.

As blood surged back into my brain, my first response was, "Yeah!! Blast those bastards silly for even thinking of such a thing!" An American flag my roommate had hung over the T.V. inspired me further, prompting clenched fists and swinging arms (I almost spilled my Budweiser onto my hot dog). About this time a commentator mentioned the inevitability of civilian casualties as "unfortunate," even though the missiles hit the Iraqi Intelligence Headquarters, as intended.

The thinking process I tried so hard to wash away re-entered my mind with a vengeance. There I was, relaxing on the couch, a college student with his own car, an air conditioned pad, and beer in the fridge. My biggest concerns being the reassembly of my motorcycle and my purpose in life (in that order). How on earth can I, or anyone else for that matter, possibly pass judgment on a military action in a land so different from ours, against a people who live and think so differently than we do?

I am in no way condoning the actions of the Iraqi government in their reported attempt on the former president's life, but can anyone possibly believe that destroying their headquarters will stun them into submission? Anyone who's ever kicked a fire-ant hill certainly knows better.

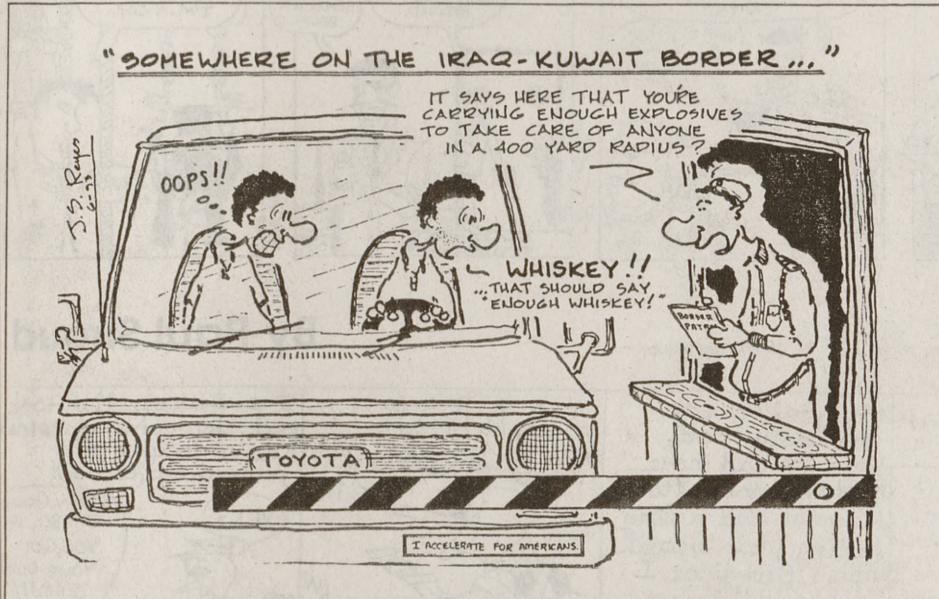
The citizens of a country are almost always going to fervently defend the actions and attitudes of their military or religious affiliation. Americans are certainly no different in this regard. If "we" decide to bomb a country, let's just do it, vaporize it. We shouldn't hide behind a self-righteous belief system (e.g. loving the Kuwaitis, not their oil). Does just thinking we're right make us right? Does it make them wrong? Is America, the country God loves most, the best country in the world? People around the globe love their countries as passionately as we do. If we were all born and raised in Jordan, wouldn't we think Jordan was worth dying for?

This whole Middle East vs. West thing is following just a little too closely on the heels of the Cold War, and a little too similarly as well. The Arab countries who hate us are primarily Muslim, and tied together by that fact. They, for the most part, view Western intervention as a Christian attack on the Nation of Islam, and ours being a predominantly Christian Nation, doesn't seem to mind the deaths of a few Muslims here and there.

I guess what I'm trying to say here is that there are two sides to every international conflict, regardless of who's involved. We should all make a special effort to "check our emotions and patriotism at the door" and see the situation from both points of view before deciding who deserves to die and who doesn't. We should also realize that just believing something to be true, politically or religiously, does not make it true. As any Aggie-American knows, Russians are the enemy, Muslims are crazed terrorists, Christians are God's people, and everything about t.u. sucks.

Texas, however, really is the best state in the country. No, really. Really.

Stanford is a graduate student in philosophy



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EDITORIAL

Cable vs. broadcast Consumers lose in signal dispute

Television reception in the Brazos Valley has never been that great, but the ramifications of a bill passed by Congress last year make the picture even more bleak.

Brazos Valley residents are trapped in an electromagnetic wasteland.

Television reception here is so poor that viewers without cable can get only three, possibly four broadcast stations: Bryan CBS affiliate KBTX-TV (channel 3), the Texas A&M-run PBS station KAMU-TV (channel 15), independent Fox station KWKT-TV out of Waco and — if conditions are just right — Waco ABC affiliate KXXV-TV (channel 25).

Cable subscribers have had no problem receiving local stations — until now. A new cable regulation bill has driven a wedge between broadcasters and cable companies.

Since the advent of cable television, the Federal Communications Commission has mandated that cable companies carry the signals of all local broadcast stations. This is the reason, for example, that TCA Cable carries two ABC affiliates, one from Houston and one from Waco, because both stations are what the FCC defines as "local."

The Cable Act of 1992 has changed all that. This law, intended to protect consumers by bringing some regulation back to the cable industry, has instead put the cable

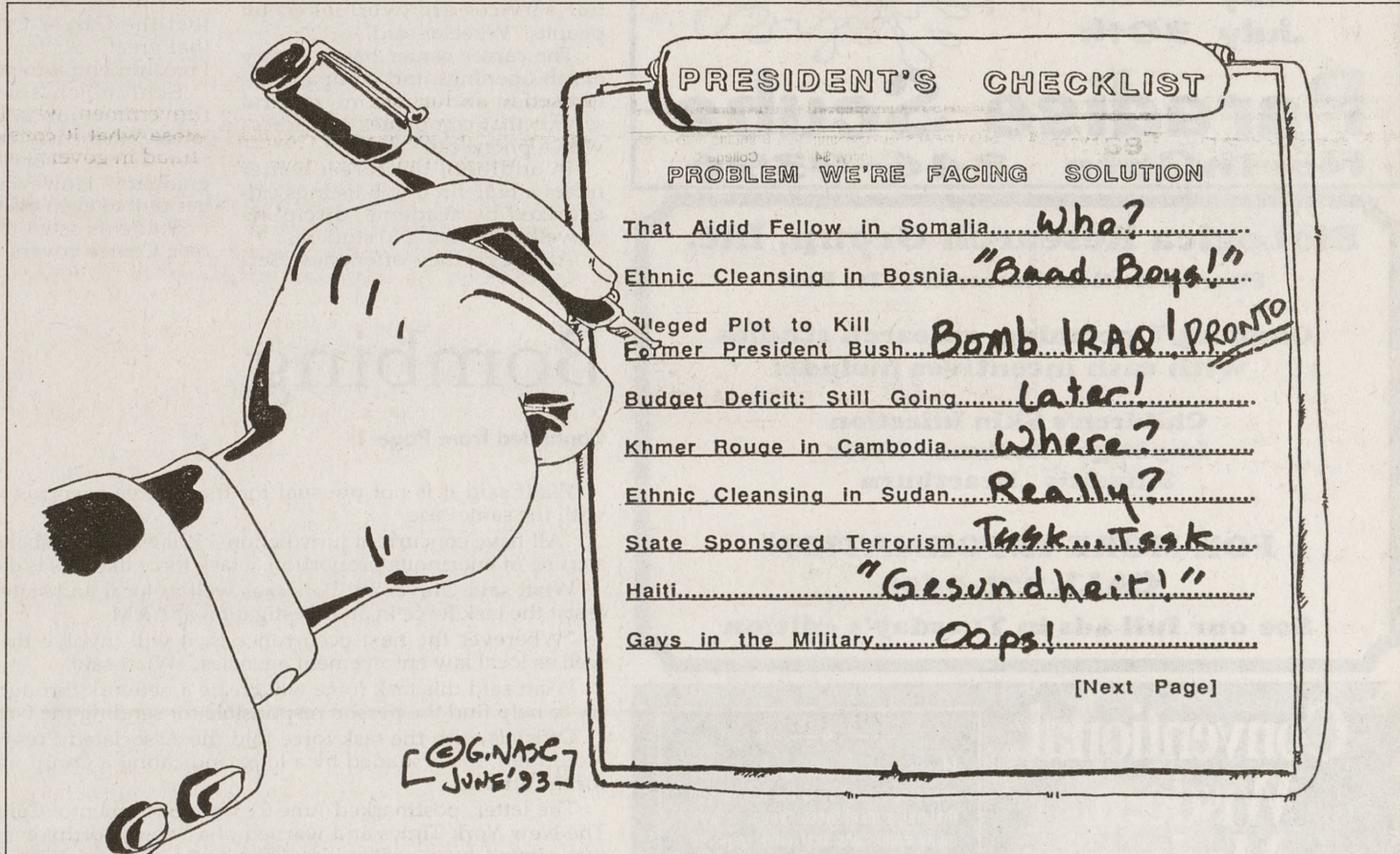
companies in an awkward position. The act gives broadcasters the option of seeking reimbursement for allowing cable companies to run their signal.

This option, called retransmission consent, was intended to protect broadcast stations threatened by the booming cable industry. Although this plan might work in large cities where broadcast television signals are powerful enough to reach a large population, Bryan-College Station's lack of stations means subscribers have no viewing alternative if the cable company decides not to pay broadcast stations for their signals.

Although some stations have opted for a "must carry" status, which means the cable company cannot drop the signal but the station can't charge for it, other broadcasters have asked for retransmission consent.

If TCA agrees, it will pass the costs along to its subscribers. If the cable company refuses, these stations will no longer be seen on cable which means a drop in audience and therefore advertising revenue — not to mention the loss to the viewers.

It is in the public's and the broadcasters' best interest for these stations to remain on cable. Unless the broadcast stations request to be carried free of charge, they — as well as the viewers — will lose.



Government-subsidized system inflates health care costs

One of the unfortunate aspects of America's health care debate is that the question why health care costs are escalating is often ignored. Paradoxically, health care costs too much because it costs us too little.



MATT DICKERSON
Columnist

Trouble certainly looms ahead: Health care spending totaled \$839.5 billion in 1992, over 14 percent of the nation's total economic output, and is expected to reach over \$1 trillion in 1994. This is a serious social problem because the rate of increase in health care expenditures has been twice the rate of increase of the nation's total economic output.

Because health care is a service industry, it tends to be more labor-intensive than manufacturing industries. Emptying bedpans will take approximately as much time today as it did a hundred years ago. Some operations

defy mechanization and higher productivity, keeping prices up relative to manufactured goods.

Also, health care is a "superior good." A superior good's consumption increases disproportionately with income growth. For instance, health economists have found that for every 10 percent increase in per capita income there is a 13 percent increase in per capita health care consumption. Ninety percent of the difference in health care expenditures among developed countries derives from income differences between countries, and this holds true whether health care spending is financed via the market, the political system or quasi-public institutions.

But these factors are only part of the total equation. Third-party payers (employer, insurance company or government) pay most of the nation's health care bills. For every dollar we spend at the hospital, 95 cents are paid by a third party. Likewise, for every dollar we spend on physicians' fees, over 80 cents are paid by a third party. For the health care system as a whole, over 76 cents are paid by third parties for every \$1 that we consume. That is why health care is "cheap": it's subsidized.

So consumers have little incentive to restrain consumption, so demand soars, as do prices. That's why health care "costs too much."

The government subsidizes this third-party payer system. By law, health insurance premiums paid through employers escapes, for instance, a 20 percent income tax, a 15.3 percent Social Security tax, and in some states, a state income tax. The subsidy ensures that employees will overinsure, preferring greater, even wasteful, insurance to higher wages.

Incidentally, this is why we now have a debate on "stagnating wages" in this country. Because wages do not include rapidly growing untaxed benefits, wages appear to be stagnating or even falling. But total compensation, which accounts for wages and benefits, is increasing. Workers are converting wages into untaxed benefits, the main incentive being the government subsidy of insurance premiums.

The American health care system is hardly a free market system. As of 1990, the government's (federal, state and local) share of health care spending, counting tax subsidies for health insurance, was over half of all health care spending. Just two federal pro-

grams, Medicare and Medicaid, accounted for 28 percent of total health care spending, up from 5.9 percent in 1967.

Much of this increased spending increases prices rather than services. According to the Health Care Financing Administration, which oversees Medicare, every extra dollar spent on health care increases prices by 65 cents and buys only 35 cents in real services. This explains the rampant health care inflation.

Unfortunately, much of the health care debate centers upon the demonization of some allegedly greedy party and not upon the incentives that the government has created.

Take the Clinton administration's favorite targets, drug companies and doctors. Both allegedly make too much money. But if the drug company profits are cut by half, health care costs would drop less than one percent. If doctors' net incomes were cut by 20 percent, health care costs would fall by less than two percent. There is no solution here.

Because the federal laws have shaped so much of our health care crisis, they are in dire need of reform. In a rational world, reforms would em-

phasize health insurance that is a dollar for dollar substitute for wages — eliminating the current subsidy — and take insurance program control from employers and give them back to employees who now are afraid to leave jobs because health benefits are not transportable. Individuals need to be given the incentive to control their own medical consumption decisions.

Dickerson is a sophomore economics major

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