

## IRS refund goof harmful to all

(U-WIRE) BLOOMINGTON, Ind. — I feared the worst and hoped for the best out of President Bush's tax relief package. With the IRS in charge of distribution, you can't expect much. A study released earlier this year reported that IRS employees spend 51 percent of their on-line time doing personal business. Even worse, 37 percent of taxpayers didn't get their calls to the IRS answered, and those that got a response were given wrong answers 47 percent of the time.

Could the IRS handle the task of carrying out the "Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001?" An old joke says that things are getting so bad in Washington that people are tracing the meaning of "politics" to its Latin roots: Poli is for blood-sucking parasites.

OK, so it's a cheesy joke, but consider the facts. At the turn of the year, tax rates, as a percentage of GDP, were the highest they have ever been in peacetime. The government took nearly 40 percent of the typical family's income in taxes after accounting for all federal, state and local taxes. This is more than twice the rate paid by the typical family in 1955.

Moreover, consider that according to congressional budget estimates, there is a projected surplus of more than \$5 trillion during the next 10 years. —It's not hard to imagine why both major presidential candidates promised a tax cut in some form or another in the 2000 election. But as even the most detached political observer knows, it was President Bush that made the issue a centerpiece in his campaign. And for that, we must give him credit. He changed the debate from if we should have a tax cut to how big it should be.

People have devoted their entire lives to studying and explaining tax rates, government revenue, economic growth and how all three interact. But to put it as simply as possible, unnecessarily high tax rates present less incentives to work, lower production and therefore lower government revenue from taxes. Conversely, a lower tax rate offers more incentive to work, produce and invest. With the increased productivity, government revenue will actually rise, even with a lower tax rate. And as an added benefit, you'll be able to streamline

that paragon of a government agency: the IRS.

Like he promised, Bush signed the biggest tax relief package in a generation and opened the door to this needed reform. The key to the whole idea is, obviously, getting money back to the very people that earned it so that they can invest and spend it.

But the IRS, as well as the president, couldn't wait for you to get out and spend the rebate. So it sent more than 121 million letters (costing millions of dollars) to notify people that they'd soon be receiving a tax rebate. Just to make sure they knew who was responsible, President George W. Bush prominently displayed his name on the check. I got my letter last Friday, but it informed me that I "will not be receiving a check at this time." Since I didn't pay any federal taxes, I sure don't expect to get any back.

A half-million families got a different kind of letter. Unfortunately the letter they received was a lie and won't be as big as it promised. An Internal Revenue Service computer glitch overestimated the rebates for those 500,000. Before the check arrived, as you can imagine, many people went ahead and spent the extra money they thought they would have. So when the smaller check arrives, many families will have already spent the money. Now the IRS is scrambling to send out new letters correcting the mistake, but the correction letters will arrive much later than their smaller-than-expected rebate. The result? More debt for 500,000 families!

Ah, but the IRS wants us to know that there's a good side to all of this. Agency spokesman Kevin McKeon points out that, "The good is that 99.5 percent of the people are getting the right letter." They might consider the error a minor mistake, but it threatens to destroy the very purpose and aim behind the relief. Just imagine the chaos if even more families had been affected.

President Bush showed courage and political savvy by winning the tax cut battle. It will give a needed boost to a slowing economy. Now he must take the next step and ensure real long-term reform in government revenue: Overhaul the IRS.

Joshua Claybourn  
Indiana Daily Student  
Indiana University

## You need body art

### Outdated laws against tattooing should be revised

The United States is a nation built on laws. People trust the law and expect to be protected by it and by those who uphold it. Unfortunately, more and more often people are finding that laws in their hometowns are outdated, outmoded prohibitions on practices that once were considered immoral or unsanitary. One such outdated law is the prohibition on tattooing, which still exists in many counties across the country.



JASON BENNYHOFF

Tattooing was outlawed in Massachusetts until an October court decision found the law unconstitutional because it restricted personal and commercial free speech. The fight that ended in Massachusetts with a victory for tattoo enthusiasts is now heating up in Cleveland, Ohio, where a tattoo parlor owner is suing the city with the help of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to overturn an 80-year-old ban on the practice.

Tony DeRigo, owner of Chronic Tattoo in Elyria, Ohio, claims that the ban on tattooing in Cleveland unfairly hurts his business and restricts the free speech rights of those who live in the city.

Recent years have seen large amounts of specious lawsuits against everyone but God seeking to justify any type of abhorrent behavior under the guise of free speech. However, DeRigo's argument seems as cut-and-dry as a free speech issue can be. Tattooing is different from writing a letter or painting a picture only in terms of medium.

Most Americans find the idea of government restrictions on their right to espouse their political or religious views on paper as clearly unconstitutional and unethical. So, it seems that there should be no problem in extending that argument to voicing such views on one's body.

Other reasons for overturning such anti-tattooing bans are the loopholes that often are found in them. In the case of the Cleveland law, tattoo artists are allowed to practice within the city limits if

they work only at trade shows that last no more than four days. This, combined with the fact that the law is part of the city's sanitation code, seems to make it clear that the original intent of the law was to cut down on the practice of tattooing for health reasons.

In the 1920s, sanitation was surely a much larger factor in deciding to get a tattoo. However, today's sanitation methods are far more effective.

Widespread use of autoclave sterilization devices and sterile, disposable materials have made tattooing far safer than it once was. The city is still free to place regulations on the health and safety of tattoo parlors if it chooses to repeal the ban, so why not repeal it?

"Hopefully, the city will be adult and modern enough to understand that (tattooing) is very safe," DeRigo said.

Considering that DeRigo brought his case before the city in February and no resolution has been found, apparently the city was not as adult as DeRigo hoped.

This case is merely a symptom of a nationwide problem.

This country, and the city of Cleveland specifically, should realize that it is time to update the books. Outdated laws such as this one only serve to make life difficult for ordinary, law-abiding people and deplete the budgets of local governments embroiled in legal battles to change the laws. Anti-tattooing bans, sodomy laws and the like penalize ordinary people for victimless crimes and ultimately hurt the constituency they were originally designed to protect.

Jason Bennyhoff is a senior journalism major.



RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

## CARTOON OF THE DAY



THE UN-CARTOONIST ©

## Mail Call

### Rather's silence on Levy acceptable

In response to Mark Passwaters' July 23 column.

I would like to start off by saying that I would personally congratulate Dan Rather for not talking about the disappearance of Chandra Levy. Over the past month, the public has been bombarded with the same undeveloped story, over and over again. Every morning and every evening we here the same rehashing of the same facts and possibilities. To be quite frank, I am tired of hearing it. Why don't they use the 30 minutes to report on other events that are occurring, and that are developing.

My second problem is that Passwaters complains about someone being partial, when he is regularly partial himself. Granted, he is only a columnist in the opinion section of a school newspaper, not a national news anchor. And as such he is of

course supposed to show his view and opinion. But when all he uses as supportive sources is Bill O'Reilly and *The Washington Post*, we can clearly see where his leanings are.

I think Passwaters should take note of one of the quotes he used from Don Imus, and ask himself "when he plans to get in touch with the rest of the world?" He needs to realize that there is far more going on in the world that deserves air time besides the same old story.

Nathan Bosdet  
Class of '02

### Marriage a social, not religious, institution

In response to July 23 mail call.

Contrary to Gardner's beliefs, marriage is not just a religious institution. It is a social institution, so there-

fore society should see fit to change it. In no way does this infringe on the rights of some religions.

Christians do not own marriage, it is not something one group can own. The government is not saying that all marriages must be same-sex. By not allowing same-sex marriages we are violating the rights of homosexuals (yes, they have rights Mr. Gardner). Isn't everyone entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

The stats that Gardner introduces would be funny if they were not so bigoted. Where exactly did you learn that homosexuality leads to bestiality and pedophilia? If a Catholic priest commits a sex crime against a child, does that mean all Catholics will do the same?

Let us look at the crimes that are a result of the heterosexual lifestyle. Heterosexuals are far more likely to commit rape and spousal abuse. Does that mean that we should oppress heterosexuals? Mr. Gardner, even if you believe

the homosexual lifestyle is something that people choose to do, then why not let them choose that?

Is not one of the great things about being an American the right to choose? If you do not like the homosexual lifestyle, then do not participate in it. But do not oppress it. That goes against everything that United States stands for.

David Girkin  
Class of '02

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number.

The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 014 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters may also be mailed to:

The Battalion - Mail Call  
014 Reed McDonald  
Texas A&M University  
College Station, TX  
77843-1111

Campus Mail: 1111  
Fax: (979) 845-2647  
E-mail: battletters@hotmail.com