

Impossible terms

U.S. has responsibility to rebuild Iraqi infrastructure it helped destroy in war

The United States has been a rather generous country when it comes to giving aid to other countries in need, especially since World War II. This generosity was most prominently manifested in the grand Marshall Plan, by which the United States helped fund the rebuilding of a Western Europe that was wrecked in part by American explosives.



DAVID SHOEMAKER

Although such programs cannot be undertaken solely for their moral merits, those and the other more pragmatic benefits from such programs, when well run, can be great. The U.S. Senate's recent decision to change some \$10 billion of the \$87 million needed for Iraq from grants to loans destined for Iraq is a shortsighted misstep that must be corrected.

Iraq is in dire need of money to get its economy and infrastructure back on its feet. According to an article from the BBC, a World Bank team sent to Iraq told the Coalition Provisional Authority that \$35.6 billion is needed to rebuild Iraq's infrastructure in areas such as water supplies and electrical service. An additional \$19.4 billion was considered necessary by the same panel to improve other essential areas, such as security and the oil industry.

This contrasts with a study done by McKinsey Consulting, quoted in the same article stating \$90 billion was really needed, with \$35 billion to \$40 billion for the oil industry alone. Projected oil revenues of \$10 billion for the year cannot cover the government payrolls of roughly \$15 billion or even make a dent in

the \$134 billion debt left by the previous regime. Clearly Iraq is in no shape to tap its massive oil reserves and has no pot of cash in the national treasury. Thus, the Senate's vote to make loans of \$10 billion of the first \$20.3 billion appropriations in the Bush administration's \$87 billion plan makes no sense.

Specifically, according to The Houston Chronicle, the first \$10 billion will be given as a loan rather than a grant unless the countries Iraq owes outstanding debt to forgive at least 90 percent of the debts. This is supposedly to prevent the use of the money to pay down the Iraqi national debt.

Such terms will be almost impossible for the Iraqis to meet.

The countries to which they owe debt have no concern if the Iraqis have to pay the United States back. This will not give the United States any more leverage in the upcoming meeting of the countries and organizations about contributing funds to rebuild Iraq.

It will take Iraq a while to export enough oil to begin paying off its debts, and even then it will be subject to fluctuations in oil prices. Saddling Iraq with another \$10 billion on top of the more than \$130 billion in debt helps no one. But it also raises a larger issue: Does the United States and its allies bear a moral duty to help pay to rebuild what their explosives helped

age done during the 12 years between the wars. Some of the damage done by coalition aircraft from the first Persian Gulf War still had not been repaired completely by the time of the second war.

Now that Saddam has been defeated, the United States and its coalition partners owe it to the average Iraqi to help restore his power, transportation and running water.

According to the BBC, the European Union has offered only \$320 million to the effort, and the United Kingdom has offered nothing. Even though the United States fought the war, the coalition that fought Saddam in 1991 also owes something, at least for any damage incurred by their forces still remaining from 1991.

Regardless of the reason, by any appraisal, asking for loans from Iraq at this point is pure folly. It will only hurt Iraq's financial situation and hurt the United States' reputation with Iraqis and in the Arab world. It will raise even more questions about why the United States is still there.

Those in the Senate looking to use this episode for personal benefit should heed Sen. John McCain's warning — that changing the money into loans show that the United States is only in Iraq for oil — and fall in with the House and administration on this matter. They should do what is practical and what is right, and give the hand up to the Iraqis, even if it has to be a handout for now.



MAHESH NEELAKANTAN • THE BATTALION

David Shoemaker is a junior management major.

Personal pay raises should not be a priority for Congress

Early 20th century journalist H. L. Mencken once quipped that the government consisted basically of ordinary people with "no special talent for the business of government; they have only a talent for getting and holding office." While this statement contains both elements of truth and humor, the fact that these same people whose talent is in question — the members of the U.S. Congress — are treating themselves to a fifth consecutive pay raise is quite serious, boosting their annual salary to about \$158,000 in 2004.



MIKE WALTERS

But, it gets better. In 1989, Congress members got around the public and political hassle of having the media report that they were openly voting to give themselves raises. Since that year, Congress automatically raises its salary each year unless lawmakers specifically vote against it. It would be interesting to see what a corporate manager would call it if an employee gave himself an "automatic pay raise," as Congress is calling it, from the cash drawer after each year of service. The term would certainly not be as forgiving.

Sen. Russel Feingold, D-Wisconsin, recognizing the wrong in this activity, has opposed this year's pay raise despite the fact that he would get his cut along with everyone else. "This automatic, stealth pay raise system is just wrong," Feingold said. "I, for one, would be interested to hear someone explain just why Congress should get a \$3,400 pay raise in the face of record budget deficits, an economic downturn and record unemployment."

Feingold isn't alone in his opposition; however, the majority

of Congress was not honest enough to agree. The Senate voted against his bill to block the raise, 60 to 34. Members supporting the pay raise may argue that their 2.2 percent pay raise is still less than the average pay raise in private business, which was an average pay increase of 2.7 percent last year, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

But are the two comparisons really applicable? Anybody who has worked in the corporate world — be it from the office to the back of a fast food restaurant — knows that getting a raise requires clear, documented proof to management that one has earned it. Has Congress proven to the taxpayers funding the pay raise that it has earned it?

Though many critics would answer "no," consider their argument about the corporate world. The fact is that if the company isn't doing well and having a hard time keeping its books in the black, employee raises are the first expenditures to be put on hold or cut altogether. Despite a weak economy and Congress' recent reluctance to grant the president his request to continue funding the war on terrorism's Iraqi front, Congress apparently feels a salary increase is still in order.

This logic leads one to wonder about congressional priorities. Do their interests truly lie with the priorities of the people who elect them? This is certainly not an easy question to answer but consider that this salary increase will be the fifth in a row for

Congress, totaling \$21,000. This is more than a U.S. worker making minimum wage earns in a year and a half. Speaking of minimum wage — though Congress has raised its own wage

five times in the last five years, the minimum wage hasn't been increased since 1997. While the government's policy of forcing private businesses to pay their employees a minimum amount is inconsistent with the capitalist ideals the founders formed our government upon, the fact is worth considering when wondering about congressional priorities.

Earning a worthy salary for productive effort is the basis of the prosperity that is the American dream. However, without giving people a reasonable basis for spending more of the country's tax dollars on giving Congress a pay raise, the government hasn't shown that Congress members deserved such prosperity. If they want to increase their salary, they have to do so like any other hardworking American — they have to earn it. Sneakily awarding themselves more money with no explanation and against what Americans know about the country's budget problems does nothing to prove to the nation that its Congressmen deserve it.

“Despite a weak economy and Congress' recent reluctance to grant the president his request to continue funding the war on terrorism's Iraqi front, Congress apparently feels a salary increase is still in order.”

Mike Walters is a senior psychology major.

MAIL CALL

Remake of movie fails to meet original

In response to Jose Cruz's Oct. 27 movie review:

The review by Mr. Cruz was so incorrect in that it constitutes an absolute disservice to any potential filmgoer who reads them. I was surprised and a little offended that Mr. Cruz chose to rate the remake of "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre" more highly than Tobe Hooper's original visionary masterpiece. I am in no way trying to deny that Mr. Cruz has a right to express his opinions, but I am disturbed that The Battalion would choose to print what is a sadly illiterate interpretation of one of the greatest horror films ever made.

Mr. Cruz states that Hooper's film doesn't "inspire or articulate." A more knowledgeable viewing of this film would yield exactly the opposite impression. "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre" is an intellectual experience as well as a horrifying one. Embedded within its bloodshed is

an intense, convicting examination of violence, poverty and feminism. The remake simply lacks the intelligence and originality of its predecessor. It's an ugly film that I hope will be wiped from the memory of cinema by Christmas time.

Clint Bland
Class of 2006

Space program could be used against U.S.

In response to Hayden Migl's Oct. 27 column:

If I am reading Hayden Migl's article correctly, he is suggesting that we, the United States, should assist China in its space exploration because it "might bring some of the excitement back into the space program." We just spent the last half century fighting the communists in the Cold War. Thousands battled the Chinese in Korea and Vietnam trying to stop the spread of communism. Now he is suggesting we

help them launch missions into space that can potentially threaten our national security.

Why would we want to help them launch satellites which can be used as weapons and to spy on us? To motivate the American people to become excited about NASA again? Or maybe the Chinese government will have an awakening and become democratic like its sister Russia did. Sorry, son, we do not aid the enemy, and communism is the enemy.

Charles Holland
Class of 2005

Constitution should be corrected if wrong

In response to an Oct. 27 mail call:

Ms. Scarmardo does have a point that this country's belief system was founded on religious principles, but that is about the only one. Please do not forget that slavery and the

massacre of the Native American population was also based on these principles. Not only do we have the right to "correct" the U.S. Constitution (that's why we have amendments), but an obligation to do so when it is necessary.

Allison Lothman
Class of 2003

On-campus students need garage spots

In response to David Ege's Oct. 28 column:

By paying extra money, resident garage spot holders do deserve a designated spot. That is the whole point of the garage. You mention that with an increase in garage passes sold, a price decrease for a parking garage spot might be observed. Not only would this be compulsory because the worth of the pass would have dropped dramatically, but this unjustified statement answers no questions nor

does it solve any current problems, for there is no outcry for the decrease in garage parking fees.

On-campus people live on campus, they don't commute here. If they own a garage spot and can't find a spot to park in the garage, they do not have the option of using A&M's well-established bus system to get to class as off-campus students do, unless you're willing to let us park in your driveway.

Neal Landfield
Class of 2006

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 200 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 also may be mailed to: 014 Reed McDonald, MS 1111, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-1111. Fax: (979) 845-2647 Email: mailcall@thebattalion.net