



## The Bunkhouse Chronicle

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Columnist

### Billions and billions

\$3.5 billion.

That's how much money the United States gave to Pakistan in 2011. Since 2007, there has never been a year when we sent them less than a billion greenbacks. Many of those years it was considerably more. That's our money, yours and mine, that one White House and Congress or another has forked over to an unstable, essentially borderless Islamic Republic, year after year, for "economic and military aid and development."

That's a lot of our billions, and those are public figures, so we can assume the hard number is much higher. I keep wondering what we are getting in return for that kind of expenditure.

So this weekend, while battering down a few things around our place in "get it done before the snow flies" mode, I kept wondering what it might look like if we had taken some of those tens of billions and reinvested them in ourselves — our own children, our own development, our own future.

What if we had gone completely nuts and decided that we could have used those billions redesigning our public-education system so that it resembled something like the world-class institutions they have in Finland, or Switzerland, where becoming a teacher is third only to the medical and legal professions, where the competition for jobs is fierce, and the students keep reaping the rewards of instructors who make a salary commensurate with their national importance.

Just a thought.

What if we had spent a few of those billions on the Pine Ridge Reservation, in South Dakota, which is an on-going national disgrace. With an infant mortality rate 300 times the national average, an unemployment rate that has remained consistently at 80-90 percent, and where the median income is somewhere in the neighborhood of \$3000 a year, Pine

Ridge represents a catastrophic failure in our moral clarity.

Perhaps the City of Flint, Michigan, could have a few of those billions that we gave to Pakistan — a country chock full of people who despise us — for new water pipes.

Maybe we could have used a few of those billions to fund cancer research, or to find a cure for ALS.

We all understand the geo-political necessity of aid programs. No superpower that doesn't fund them will be a superpower very long, and we might all agree that being a superpower has its decided advantages. For one, we get to argue about things half of the world doesn't even have the luxury to think about.

But I wonder how much of this we can actually afford.

As of this morning, the national debt stands at about \$19 trillion, according to the big debt clock. That's about \$60k to every citizen, and \$163k to every taxpayer, should the bill come due. What's particularly troublesome is that no one running for president seems to be talking about it. Except, perhaps, the libertarian guy, whose years of hot-boxing with Cheech and Chong finally caught up to him

when he couldn't remember what Aleppo is.

And so Pakistan keeps getting their billions. And they aren't alone. Israel gets \$4 billion. Egypt and Afghanistan get about \$1.5 billion per. Kenya, Nigeria, and Tanzania each clear about a half-billion per year of our tax dollars.

Each year they line up with their hands out, and the President looks over the heads of our own citizens while forking over the billions. Congress has something to do with this, of course, but with an approval rate currently at 11 percent it's hard to believe that anyone cares what they are doing anymore.

The United States is a generous country. In 2013, the U.S. — that's you and me — gave 4.9 million metric tons of food to the rest of the world. We give a lot of that food to North Korea, a country so backward and depraved it regularly threatens to turn the world into a "sea of fire." We did that so they wouldn't work on their nukes anymore, and so last week they tested another one.

Our food donations to the world represent 51 percent of the world's food donations. It represents 46.2 million beneficiaries — hungry

people — in 56 different countries. That's food on top of the money we dole out. We did that, whether we knew it or not, while some of our own citizens go hungry and homeless, and without the resources to even begin thinking about how to improve their living conditions.

Maybe we can start thinking about foreign aid a little differently. Maybe we can put our countrymen first, and reassign those billions to address the needs of our own country. Maybe we could make teachers as appreciated as athletes, fix a few roads and bridges, and dive into Appalachia and the Great Plains to help our citizens who are struggling in a new world economy.

We are spending the money, so why not spend it on us?

I'm not too interested in affixing blame for the conditions we keep finding in our own borders, or listening to the morally or politically righteous as they run through that weird new kabuki known as "virtue signaling," which is a kind of Facebooky, self-conscious and toe-dipping temporary political bravery. I am, however, interested in getting them fixed, and with an increasing sense of urgency.

# Thank You to the Community of Sisters for Making the Fundraiser for Justin Veloso a Smashing Success!



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And to anyone we may have  
accidentally overlooked!

*And the many volunteers  
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