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"THE REF, ARTEST! I SAID KILL THE REF!"

BRET FURTWANGLER | GRAPHIC ARTIST

■ In my opinion

No room at the GOVERNMENT INN

Sudan has been accused of displacing 1.6 million people from their homes in Darfur. Russia is chided for forcing Chechens in Ingushetia back to Chechnya, where they must now live on the streets. What do these violations have to do with the United States? All three countries are atop the Geneva-based Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions list of top offenders.

Although the U.S. has not displaced people from their homes because of ethnic reasons or forced convictions, the fact still stands that our nation is home to millions of house-less citizens, who are criminalized for offenses such as sleeping in public parks. According to the Centre, this violates the U.N. statement of human rights, which includes a standard of housing adequate to promote health and well-being. There is such an extreme stigma against the homeless that most Americans choose to put the issue out of their minds completely.

Subscribing to the belief that the homeless are dirty drug abusers who live on the streets out of choice rather than necessity makes it easy to ignore the sad plight of our nation's lowest class.

Unfortunately, the tactic of U.S. policy-makers seems to be one of disregard as well. Where were the campaign agendas to reach your neighborhood can-collector? Both Bush and Kerry fervently campaigned for education of the nation's children, conveniently ignoring the 1.35 million children per year who live on the streets. The No Child Left Behind act didn't just leave these



AILEE SLATER
FURTHER FROM PERFECTION

children behind, it left them suffocating in the dust. Although Bush has put the nation into severe debt through increased wartime spending and tax cuts, his 2004 budget included no new resources for the 3.5 million people living on the streets. Obviously, with numbers like that, current funding is not doing its job.

Accountability is the major problem with funding programs to help the homeless. The homeless are in a cycle in which economics prevent them from seeking out the right to vote, leading to political agendas that do not include their needs and ultimately lead to another generation of homeless who will once again not have a voice in the political sphere. On the other hand, giving money back to the rich is easy: They respond with their contributions and their votes.

Other harmful cycles which often occur in homeless population relate to drug abuse and prostitution. When children grow up without homes, food and access to education or employment, they will be likely to turn to drugs or prostitution in order to make money. Without access to birth control or sexual education services, young people are likely to become pregnant, beginning the cy-

cle once again.

One argument against policies to help the homeless is the idea that people on the streets are there by their own will, and the government is not responsible for them. However, as seen through the occupation and rebuilding of Iraq, the U.S. government has no problem putting money into causes for which it was not directly responsible.

Also, most homeless people find themselves in their situation because of a previous failing of responsibility by the government. Sixty percent of the homeless are single mothers with children, most of which have turned to the streets as their only alternative to an abusive relationship. About 35 percent of the homeless are mentally ill. Although the government has pledged to help both of these groups of people, they are conveniently ignored once out on the streets.

The U.S. is the richest nation in the world, yet is doing less to help its homeless citizens than over 150 other countries. What this nation needs is a strong national agenda against domestic violence, and drug and prostitution policies based on rehabilitation rather than criminalization. Putting tax money back into the pockets of the rich can surely wait. For politicians, ignoring the homeless is easy; people on the streets hardly have the capacity to fight back. It is time for citizens in all classes to remember and recognize the experience of the homeless as a harsh reality that needs to end.

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■ Editorial

Constructing rockets takes priority over education

During his re-election campaign, President Bush talked about returning "fiscal sanity" to this country. It was a statement so shameless that it should have cost him a second term. How did his conscience allow him to say such a thing after nearly four years of two-fisted spending and gasp-worthy federal deficits? Congress had to raise the debt ceiling for goodness sake!

But this political myth — that Republicans are the best doctors for our nation's economic health — is an enduring one, but a myth none the less.

Case in point: the FY05 federal spending bill. The \$388 billion omnibus bill, passed by Congress last week, is chock-full of pork-barrel projects, 11,772 projects at a cost of \$15,780,533,623 to be exact, according to Taxpayers for Common Sense. Some are pet projects, some are corporate handouts and some are just plain stupid.

Here are a few examples of the later:

\$25,000 for curriculum development for the study of mariachi music

\$45,000 for A+ for Abstinence for abstinence education

\$300,000 for CyberSeniors, Inc. - Experience Senior Power Program

\$250,000 for Country Music Hall of Fame

But the congressmen and congresswomen did manage to stop some spending. At the 11th hour, House Republicans instituted changes to the bill that the American Council on Education said could cost 90,000 students their Pell Grant eligibility. An additional 1 million could face reductions in their awards. The change involves using more current tax information when determining a family's level of need. The FY05 budget also contains language that caps the maximum Pell Grant award at \$4,050. President Bush has said he wants the maximum to be \$1,000 higher.

Republicans were clamoring for the change in order to cover a more than \$3 billion shortfall in the Pell Grant program. And there it is, the fiscal sanity President Bush has promised: Filling budget shortfalls with money meant for low-income students while ensuring corporations get their welfare packages fully intact. It is uncompassionate conservatism at its best. What is a more important spending priority to President Bush than Pell Grants, the largest federal aid source for college students? Sending a person back to the moon by 2020, of course. Congress took the first step toward accomplishing Bush's goal of boldly going where several men have gone before, by passing a larger-than-expected NASA FY05 budget (\$16.2 billion). But this is just the beginning: The new spacecraft alone would cost \$24.7 billion, according to Congressional Budget Office estimates.

Meanwhile, on planet Earth, the College Board estimates that students are facing tuitions over 10 percent higher this year. So as tuitions are skyrocketing, Bush is thinking about rockets. He cares more about sending a person to the moon than sending a person to college.

ONLINE POLL

THIS WEEK'S QUESTION

Do you enjoy holiday shopping?
Cast your vote at www.dailyemerald.com.

- Yes, it is a good way to show others you care for them.
- Yes, there are great deals.
- No, I don't have any money.
- No, it is too much stress.
- What? It's the holiday season?

OREGON DAILY EMERALD LETTERS POLICY

Letters to the editor and guest commentaries are encouraged, and should be sent to letters@dailyemerald.com or submitted at the Oregon Daily Emerald offices, EMU Suite 300. Electronic submissions are preferred. Letters are limited to 250 words, and guest commentaries to 550 words. Authors are limited to one submission per calendar month. Submissions should include phone number and address for verification. The Emerald reserves the right to edit for space, grammar and style. Guest submissions are published at the discretion of the Emerald.