

Abroad November 7, 2005 In the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and with an ongoing war in Iraq that costs more than \$1 billion per week, taxpayers might think Congress has better things to do with \$21 billion than send it overseas. Yet that's exactly what Congress did last Friday, approving a useless and counterproductive foreign aid spending bill. Never mind that the total federal debt recently topped \$8 trillion, or that a major US city was virtually destroyed only a few months ago. Arrogant is the only word to describe a Congress that cares so little about its own taxpaying citizens while pretending to know what is best for the world. Consider just a few of the ways your money will be used under the new bill: \$638 million for the unelected Musharraf government in Pakistan; \$735 million to continue dangerous drug meddling in South America; \$150 million for development in Gaza, in addition to the millions we already give the Palestinians every year; \$110 million for the Middle East Partnership Initiative, ostensibly for economic development, although the recipient nations include oil-rich Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Why in the world are American taxpayers giving welfare to OPEC governments? Over \$500 million for various republics in the former Soviet Union. Even as those nations spawn millionaires and even billionaires, Americans are expected to provide welfare for their poor. \$95 million in new money for the United Nations Democracy Fund, which meddles with foreign governments but never seems to change them; \$34 million for the pro-abortion United Nations Population Fund, which lectures poor people about having too many children; \$440 million for international population planning; \$80 million for the dubious Global Environment Facility, run by the World Bank to fund anti-capitalist environmental projects around the world. Constitutionally, of course, none of this spending is authorized. But there also is a strong moral case to be made against taking money from Americans and giving it to foreign governments. Foreign aid doesn't help poor people; it helps foreign elites and US corporations who obtain the contracts doled out by those foreign elites. Everyone in Washington knows this, but the same lofty rhetoric is used over and over to sell foreign aid programs. Corporate welfare is bad enough, but corporate welfare in the guise of helping poor foreigners is indecent. In many cases, foreign aid money simply distorts foreign economies and props up bad governments. In countries that pursue harmful economic policies, an infusion of US cash only exacerbates and prolongs problems. No amount of money can help nations that reject property rights, free markets, and the rule of law. Since American foreign aid programs began in earnest decades ago, tens of billions of US tax dollars have been given to nations around the globe. The utter failure of this money to change things for the better in those nations is no longer in question; even the most earnest advocates deep down must admit the obvious. Most of the recipient nations remain endlessly mired in poverty, political and legal corruption, and cultural malaise. A rational person would argue that failed aid programs should be eliminated. In Washington, however, failed programs get more money thrown at them. The American public deserves to know why there is room in the budget for foreign aid, when taxpayers face record deficits and debt at home.