

2nd Opinion: ‘Put our money where your mouth is’

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By Jon Singletary

The World Affairs Council in Dallas recently invited U2 frontman Bono to offer a follow-up address to his comments at the National Prayer Breakfast last month.

Before an audience of Gen X rock ‘n’ roll fans in jeans and T-shirts and Baby Boomer business leaders in coats and ties, Bono donned a tie with his Doc Marten’s and delivered a speech addressing foreign trade—of which Texas is the global leader—and foreign aid—for which Texas senators never seem to vote.

Trade, says Bono, is key to overcoming extreme poverty in Africa. Right now, trade rules are so skewed that cows in Europe receive more every day via government subsidies than half the population of Africa has to live on—\$2 a day. Our leaders and others in the G-8 have to find ways to promote trade justice for poor countries. The ONE Campaign is where Bono and a wide array of activists, celebrities, religious leaders, grassroots organizers and everyday citizens are trying to make this happen.

These advocates also describe how vital foreign aid is to this process. The United States spends less than one-half of 1 percent of the federal budget on poverty-focused development assistance. An increase to just 1 percent of our budget will help provide basic needs such as health, education and clean water for millions of people in Africa. Bread for the World's Offering of Letters this year offers you a chance to urge Congress to do just this.

President Bush repeatedly has made commitments that the United States will promote trade opportunities as a tool for development in poor countries. To complement this, when the leaders of the world's most powerful countries gathered last summer in Scotland, he committed to double aid to Africa and globally by 2010.

The president has assured Africa and the world that we will address issues of trade and aid in our fight against AIDS and poverty. Congress is where the greater struggle seems to exist. Foreign operations is the area of the budget where poverty-focused development assistance is found, and Congress doesn't want to see much of an increase here.

The president requested a \$23.7 billion foreign operations budget for next year, but the House of Representatives will not deliver. The House Appropriations Committee announced the allocation for foreign operations will be \$2.4 billion below the president's request. That's a significant cut when you are talking about such a small portion of the federal budget.

The Senate Appropriations Committee is making its decisions about budget proposals. We hope to hear their allocations this week. As a member of this committee, Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison is invested in how our nation spends its money. She will have a say in how much the Senate would like to see allocated to foreign operations. How do we expect her to respond?

Adding to the irony of the crowd gathered at Bono's speech was the introductory speaker. It was Sen. Hutchison. And she introduced Bono by

stating her admiration for his international advocacy and how moved she was by his homily at the Prayer Breakfast, calling us to respond to the African crisis.

The senator described a recent meeting where Bono asked the senator to lobby Chancellor Angela Merkel in hopes that the German government might increase its federal spending on Africa as well. It was clear that Sen. Hutchison has deep respect for this rock star with a cause and a deeper appreciation of the real emergency that is motivating him—the 8,500 people who die each day from AIDS and the 13,500 people who contract the HIV virus each day.

The real question for Sen. Hutchison and for all Texans has to do with how our nation will respond. After her comments the other night, I have to ask Sen. Hutchison: Will you put our money where your mouth is? Will you take this step to assure that we are the generation that loves our neighbor in Africa as much we love our neighbor next door?

Bono puts it this way: Will we in the West realize our potential, or will we sleep in the comfort of our affluence, with apathy and indifference murmuring softly in our ears?

The United States can afford to keep its promises to the world's hungry and poor people. To do this, we need to increase foreign operations appropriations for poverty-focused development assistance accounts by \$5 billion. Any funding level below the president's request of \$23.7 billion for foreign operations would shortchange vital, proven and effective efforts to alleviate human suffering.

Today is the day for you to make your voice heard. If you need more information, go to Bread for the World's website, www.bread.org, or The ONE Campaign's website, www.one.org.

Let our senators know how you feel.

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