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**No Boondoggle to Tie Foreign Aid to Recipients' Core Values**

**By Marc J. Lane**

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Official corruption, it's plain to see, stifles entrepreneurship, innovation and investment in the poorest of nations. That's one important reason the Bush administration's visionary Millennium Challenge Account plan would, for the first time, promote prosperity in the developing world by tying foreign aid to a country's commitment to rule justly, invest in its people and embrace economic freedom.

Yet, the program's future is in doubt. The ideologues who bash it contend that legislative compromises linking U.S. aid to a nation's social performance threaten to turn the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) strategy into a worthless boondoggle.

But the MCA proposal is a novel and constructive reform initiative. It promises to bring hope, opportunity and business to the neediest people on earth, but only after their governments demonstrate that their policies and institutions can realistically be expected to spur sustainable economic development.

Under the plan, an eligible country would request a monetary grant, enter into a contract with the U.S. government and submit to U.S. scrutiny. Any country that seeks MCA aid would need to encourage good governance, transparent regulation and open trade. And only measurable results would be rewarded with an incentive payout.

The pending MCA bill would energize the poorest of nations not only by affording them targeted financial assistance, but also by inviting the competition to qualify for it. As important, the program stands to root out official corruption and safeguard human rights and political liberty.

Corruption within developing countries — official bribery, extortion, fraud and embezzlement — debases democracy, distorts markets, and denies both risk-takers and workers their fair share of economic resources. It also undermines the stability and growth of our global trading system.

The MCA concept breaks with the past. Public officials would be held to high conflict-of-interest standards. They would be required to disclose their assets so the potential for illicit enrichment is kept to a minimum.

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Whistle-blowers would be protected from reprisals. Prosecutors and judges would be independent. And businesses would be forced to comply with laws banning bribery.

But the bill, which was overwhelmingly passed by the U.S. House of Representatives on July 24, faces resistance in the Senate. Its critics argue that since the MCA doesn't focus solely on economic development, it's doomed to become just another foreign aid failure.

And, truth be told, the legislation will probably be tweaked to foster gender equality, protect the environment and pursue other worthwhile goals.

The utilitarian naysayers are dead wrong to insist that the measure shouldn't do anything but directly

stimulate economic development. The better view recognizes that any law must be true to America's core values.

Countries whose development strategies don't draw on the talent and ability of women are less likely to succeed and don't deserve our support. And only countries whose environmental practices are sound can offer investors a robust climate for commerce. Compelling foreign aid recipients to adopt enlightened, pro-growth policies is good politics and good business.

Marc Lane is a business and tax attorney, a Master Registered Financial Planner, a Registered Financial Consultant, and a Certified Investment Specialist. An Adjunct Professor of Law at Northwestern University and an Adjunct Professor of Business at the University of Illinois.

## Gift Wrapping Ideas

### By Adriana Copaceanu

If you're tired of your gifts looking like everyone else's, put some creative thought to it. Gifts don't have to just be paper and ribbon that you bought at the store. Let some of these ideas inspire you.

\* Name Tags – Instead of using name tags, use the front cover from leftover Christmas or other holidays. Just cut along the crease and glue or tape the card to the top of your wrapped package. Most designs have some unprinted space to allow you to write the name of the recipient and a short note.

\* Decoration – Instead of using ribbons and bows, make the decoration part of the gift. Tie a bunch of cinnamon stick on top with ribbon. Tie your package with satin or velvet ribbon and let the ends of the ribbon flow down the package. Add a silk flower inserted in the knot of the bow. If your recipient likes to cook, tie wooden kitchen utensils in the bow. Your ribbon or wrapping paper could be replaced with a decorative kitchen towel.

\* Festive boxes – For small items, buy small Chinese take out cartons, the ones that have a folded top and metal handle. Decorate the outside with brightly colored stickers of hearts, flower, or Christmas themes. Write the recipients name on the top flaps.

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\* Original Wrapping Paper – At the craft store, buy sponges that have been cut into shapes of flowers, sailboats, etc. Dip them in paint and press them onto plain white wrapping paper or Kraft colored paper. Your decoration can fit the gift or the recipients taste.

\* Trimmings – Instead of using bows on every package, buy ornaments or small toys when they are on sale. Use these items that best fit your recipient's hobby or lifestyle and tie or glue them onto your package.

\* Name Sacks – Sew up some red, blue, yellow, and green velvet squares into sacks. Turn down the top edge, sew in place to allow a small opening for a drawstring. Write the recipients name on the bag with glue and sprinkle the glue with glitter. Fill the sacks with candy or small toys. Use more string to wrap around the package and through the drawstring to secure the sacks.

Adriana Copaceanu provides people with creative gift ideas that don't blow the bank at

. For more articles by Adriana, visit



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