

Speaker shares Iraqi experiences: Speaker will talk about experience from 2 years in Iraq

By: Sarah DiGiulio

Posted: 4/12/07

After being offered the chance to go to Iraq, a political consultant from California thought about it for a day. Then she decided to go. Eileen Padberg was supposed to stay six months, but she stayed for almost two years.

Padberg will speak at 4 p.m. today in 060 Eggers Hall about her efforts to ensure women are part of Iraq's reconstruction.

"At my very core," she said, "I feel that unless women have a say in politics, democracy will fail."

For nearly two years, Padberg helped implement a women's development program in Baghdad that helped female Iraqis expand their businesses. She said she will encourage students to feel good about going to another country to do humanitarian work, and she will explain that U.S. work in Iraq is not complete.

"Take a chance," she said. "It's good to get out of your safe zone." By working in other countries, she said people can learn how to make changes in their countries.

Padberg will also speak about the work that still needs to be done in Iraq.

"The Iraqis didn't ask us to come to Iraq - we endangered them," she said. "We need to clean up our mess and get out of there."

She recounted wearing bulletproof vests, traveling in armed caravans and living in a cramped room with four other women.

Padberg went to Iraq in June 2004 to develop a Pentagon-sponsored program for Iraqi women. She was based in Baghdad's Green Zone, which is protected for Americans. Her goal was to help women get jobs and the training needed to get hired.

She developed the program's curriculum, which included training in English, management, public speaking, and budget and finance. She also helped women acquire some of the contracts funded by the United States.

"I made sure the Iraqi women had a voice," Padberg said.

She mocked other foreign aid efforts to give Iraqi women sewing machines and teach them how to vote. "They need substance," she said. "They need a stake in the economy."

They have the talent to run their own businesses. The Iraqi women are very educated and account for 62 percent of the population. They need to develop careers, Padberg said.

Padberg has been a political consultant in California for 35 years. She worked on George Bush's presidential campaign in 1988 and Clint Eastwood's mayoral campaign in Carmel, Calif., in 1986. But she also directs much of her consultant work toward women running for office, she said.

"My major focus has been getting women involved in politics," Padberg said. "Unless we can invest substance in women, we are doomed to failure."

Anna Lumsden, graduate student in geography, said she is interested to hear what Padberg has to say. "It's just a good idea for people outside her line of work to know the contributions people are making to the reconstruction of Iraq," Lumsden said.

But work like this could impose American culture on Iraqis, said junior Cassandra Austin.

"It's important someone doesn't force the American role of women in society on another culture," said Austin, a U.S. history major. "It's admirable work if she's working within the construct of their culture."

Padberg speaks to ideals about wanting to make a difference, said Michael Scherger, who helped organize today's speech. Padberg's speech is part of the Moynihan Institute's Global Policies Lecture and Luncheon Series in Maxwell.

"This is a real-world example of a way to make a difference," said Scherger, a graduate assistant at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. "It took a lot of guts."