

What has the administration's response to this problem been?

Deafening silence.

The Higher Education Act is up for reauthorization. Yet this administration has put forward no real plan to make college more affordable.

The Bush administration has stood by while States have slashed their education budgets and raised college tuition to close State budget shortfalls.

The President's oversized tax cuts have eaten up Federal resources that we could otherwise invest in higher education, and in basic research and investment.

Despite his repeated promises to increase the value of the average Pell Grant, the President's proposed budget for next year freezes the Pell Grant for the third year in a row.

The President's budget also cuts the Perkins Loan program—the Federal work-study program that has helped tens of millions of middle- and lower-income students work their way through college.

I hope we can come up with a better answer, and many of us have proposed one.

We believe the Government can, and must, create an opportunity society, where every college-ready student or worker who needs to update his or her skills has the chance to go to college, or get additional training, without having to take on back-breaking debt to do it.

We want to increase the maximum Pell Grant from \$4,050 to \$5,100, to double the HOPE Scholarship tax credit from \$1,500 per student to \$3,000 per student, and to make the education tax credits refundable.

We also support efforts to help more African American, Hispanic, Native American, and other minority students attend college, because diversity strengthens our democracy and our economy.

James Michener fought in World War II. He helped win perhaps the greatest battle of the last century.

Americans in the 21st century will fight different battles. But the stakes are just as high.

We need to make sure that every son and daughter of America has the chance to go to college if he or she can do the work. It is not just a matter of individual self-interest. In a real sense, it is a matter of our national survival.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a period for the transaction of morning business for up to 90 minutes, with the first half of the time under the control of the majority leader or his designee, and the second half of the time under the control of the Democratic leader or his designee.

The Senator from Indiana is recognized.

Mr. LUGAR. Mr. President, I will use 8 minutes.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator is recognized for 8 minutes.

DIPLOMATIC NOMINEES

Mr. LUGAR. Mr. President, I rise to address the body this morning on the importance of Senate action to confirm pending nominations for ambassadorial and other foreign affairs posts.

Together, Republicans and Democrats on the Foreign Relations Committee have worked to move nominations as expeditiously as possible. During the past few weeks, the committee has held hearings and considered nominations for more than 30 such posts. As a group, these nominees received bipartisan support. Our members voted unanimously in favor of confirmation of each one at a business meeting last Thursday.

I was pleased last night when the Senate confirmed Paul Applegarth to be chief executive officer of the Millennium Challenge Corporation. I appreciate the work of Senator FRIST and Senator DASCHLE to move this important nomination. The launch of the Millennium Challenge Corporation presents an important opportunity for the United States to enhance the effectiveness of its development assistance. Last year, Congress appropriated \$1 billion for the MCC, and having a chief executive officer in place and ready to provide leadership in this new enterprise is a vital first step to ensuring its success.

I hope the Senate will now move with some dispatch on the rest of the pending diplomatic nominees. The posts for which these individuals have been nominated hold great importance for our country. A few examples will illustrate that point.

Among the nominees pending before the Senate is that of John Negroponte to be U.S. Ambassador to Iraq. As I said at Ambassador Negroponte's nomination hearing, the post will be one of the most consequential ambassadorships in American history. The Ambassador to Iraq not only will be called upon to lead an estimated 1,700 embassy personnel—that is, 1,000 Americans and 700 Iraqis—he will be the epicenter of international efforts to secure and reconstruct Iraq and provide the developing Iraqi government with the opportunity to achieve responsible nationhood.

American credibility in the world, progress in the war on terrorism, relationships with our allies, and the future of the Middle East depend on a positive outcome in Iraq. What happens there during the next 18 months almost certainly will determine whether we can begin to redirect the Middle East toward a more productive and peaceful future.

The stakes for the United States in achieving success in Iraq could not be higher.

I understand there is leadership activity that may make it possible for the ambassadorship of John

Negroponte to be considered by the Senate very soon. I very much appreciate that effort.

The pending nominees also include individuals to be ambassadors to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, and Sierra Leone, each of which is struggling in the aftermath of ethnic conflict. They include nominees to be ambassadors to Poland, Romania, and Slovenia, at a time when these countries are joining the European Union and looking to deepen their ties to the United States. They include nominees to be ambassadors to Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen at a time when the United States must improve its relations and encourage democracy and reform in the greater Middle East. They include also nominees to be ambassadors to important regional anchors, such as Brazil, Nigeria, South Africa, and South Korea.

The ambassadorial nominees currently awaiting Senate confirmation would represent the United States in countries with a collective population of more than 700 million people.

Foreign governments notice when U.S. ambassadorships to their countries go unfilled for lengthy periods of time. An ambassadorial absence can be read by some nations as a sign of declining American interest. The United States needs strong and effective diplomatic representation abroad to ensure cooperation in the fight against terrorism, to prevent proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, to build trade and investment relationships that will strengthen our economy and advance freedom and democracy worldwide.

We also must remember that ambassadorships function not only as representation of the United States, but as managers of their embassies. Given that U.S. diplomatic missions have been terrorist targets and remain the most visible American symbol in many countries with a terrorist presence, we need leadership at these embassies. Needless to say, depriving an embassy of its ambassador in a time of terrorist threat may have consequences as grave as depriving a military unit of its commander in time of conflict.

Over the years, the Senate generally has done its duty to efficiently move ambassadorial nominees. We should proceed carefully and thoughtfully when we evaluate diplomatic nominations. But we should proceed with dispatch. Nominations must not be delayed by inattention, bureaucratic arguments, or political motivations, and when our examinations are complete, we should send the nominees to their post as quickly as possible.

I am confident the Senate understands the importance of confirming nominees who will be on the front lines of efforts to advance U.S. interests around the world, and I ask all Members to join the Foreign Relations Committee in moving these nominees. I thank the Chair.