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## Support of Graduate Education

Some 23 years ago, in the wake of Sputnik and at President Eisenhower's request, Congress enacted the National Defense Education Act. In doing so, it said that "the security of the nation requires the fullest development of the mental resources and technical skills of its young men and women. . . . We must increase our efforts to identify and educate more of the talent of our nation. This requires programs that will give assurance that no student of ability will be denied an opportunity for higher education because of financial need."

Since that time, broad bipartisan support in both Congress and the White House has continued to reaffirm the importance of federal support for successive generations of students.

Now a president committed to enhancing our military preparedness and to strengthening the economy has embarked, in his 1983 budget proposals, on a course that would place these goals in jeopardy. In reversing the bipartisan developments of more than two decades, these budget proposals would eliminate federal support of certain grant programs; eliminate support of the loan program begun by the National Defense Education Act, now called the NDSL Program; and reduce both eligibility for and federal support of the Guaranteed Student Loan Program.

While these proposals are all hurtful, severely affecting both undergraduates and graduate students, perhaps the most serious is the elimination of graduate student eligibility for the Guaranteed Student Loan Program.

In the past, graduate students have been able to borrow up to \$5000 per year under the program. This year, about half the country's graduate students are using guaranteed student loans to help defray their costs of education. The Administration has proposed that graduate students now use instead a variation of the federal PLUS program, designed for parents of undergraduate students. Yet all indications are that these loans simply will not be made available to graduate students who, with only their future careers to offer as collateral, will not be regarded as suitable risks by lenders. Even if such loans were to become available, the program's terms, requiring immediate repayment or accrual of 14 percent interest while the student is still in school, would make PLUS loans an intolerable burden.

If this proposal is accepted by Congress, the effect on graduate and professional education could be devastating. Many students planning on graduate study will be discouraged, and many now in the midst of their studies will be unable, financially, to complete their programs. Inevitably, social and economic diversity in enrollments will narrow, as educational opportunity will be tied more closely to economic status. In the long run, declines in the quality or quantity of graduate enrollments will impair the ability of the research universities to conduct basic research. The most likely result will be a reduction in our nation's capacity to innovate, to lead in science and technology, to compete successfully in international markets, and to secure our defenses.

The Guaranteed Student Loan Program should not be closed to graduate students. Rather, Congress should establish reasonable financial criteria for student eligibility, as some urged before the Middle Income Student Assistance Act of 1978 made all students eligible without regard to need. Other equitable ways of reducing the cost to the government should be considered as well. But the in-school interest subsidy and the federal guarantee to lenders, which are essential components of the program, should be retained.

Excellence in graduate education and in basic and applied research requires the continued engagement of the ablest and brightest young women and men. This objective—manifestly in the broadest national interest—requires continued ready access to loan funds, access provided by the Guaranteed Student Loan Program.—PAUL E. GRAY, *President, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge 02139*