

To keep us in the race, hit the books

Misun

What if we were really having a national discussion about what is most important to the country today and on the minds of most parents?

I have no doubt that it would be a loud, noisy dinner-table conversation about why so many U.S. manufacturers are moving abroad — not just to find lower wages, but to find smarter workers, better infrastructure and cheaper health care. It would be about why in Germany 36 percent of undergrads receive degrees in science and engineering; in China, 59 percent; in Japan, 66 percent; and in America, only 32 percent. It would be about why Japanese on bullet trains can get access to the Internet with cell phones, and Americans get their cell phone service interrupted five minutes from home.

It would be about why U.S. 12th-graders recently performed below the international average for 21 countries in math and science, and it would be about why, in recent years, U.S. industry appears to have spent more on lawsuits than on research and development. Yes, we'd be talking about why the world is racing us to the top, not the bottom, and why we are quietly falling behind.

And late in the evening, as the wine bottles emptied, someone at the national dinner table might finally say: "Hey, what if we were really thinking ahead? What if we asked some of the country's best minds to make a list of the steps we could take right now to enhance America's technology base?"

Fortunately, two senators, Lamar Alexander and Jeff Bingaman, asked the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Engineering and the Institute of Medicine to form a bipartisan study group to produce just such a list, which was released on Wednesday in a report called "Rising Above the Gathering Storm."

Because of globalization, the report begins, U.S. "workers in virtually every sector must now face

at all."

The report's key recommendations? Nothing fancy. Charles Vest, the former president of MIT, summed them up: "We need to get back to basic blocking and tackling" — educating more Americans in the skills needed for 21st-century jobs.

Among the top priorities, the report says, should be these:

- Annually recruiting 10,000 science and math teachers by awarding four-year merit-based scholarships, to be paid back through five years of K-12 public school teaching. (We have too many unqualified science and math teachers.)

- Strengthening the math and science skills of 250,000 other teachers through extracurricular programs.

- Creating opportunities and incentives for many more middle school and high school students to

take advanced math and science courses, by offering, among other things, \$100 mini-scholarships for success in exams, and creating more specialty math-and-science schools.

- Increasing federal investment in long-term basic research by 10 percent a year over the next seven years.

- Annually providing research grants of \$500,000 each, payable over five years, to 200 of America's most outstanding young

researchers.

- Creating a new Advanced Research Projects Agency in the Energy Department to support "creative out-of-the-box transformational energy research that industry by itself cannot or will not support and in which risk may be high, but success would provide dramatic benefits for the nation."

- Granting automatic one-year visa extensions to foreign students in the United States who receive doctorates in science, engineering or math so they can seek employment here, and creating 5,000 National Science Foundation-administered graduate fellowships to increase the number of U.S. citizens earning doctoral degrees in fields of "national need." (See the rest at www.nationalacademies.org.)



Thomas L. Friedman

New York Times

Maureen Dowd's Oct. 5 column, "All the president's women," was a disturbing diatribe against some of the finest advisers ever to assist a president. Ms. Dowd was particularly insulting to Supreme Court nominee Harriet Miers, a strong, evangelical Christian like President Bush. Dowd, obviously chagrined that Ms. Miers is "a woman who shares his faith," seems to expect the Supreme Court to come undone because of Miers' "opinions that derive from her faith."

Whatever else Harriet Miers does or does not have going for her, her deep and sincere faith in Jesus Christ should not be a factor prohibiting assignment to the Supreme Court or any other public office. I believe the basis for this hostility is as old and nasty as prejudice itself — ignorance and fear. Three categories come to mind: constitutional history, evangelical Christianity and personal freedom.

Ignorance of our own history has produced most of today's foolish rhetoric about liberal constitutional meaning. While scholars may disagree about how many of the key Founding Fathers were specifically Christians, most admit those leaders shared a common belief in a just and powerful God,

to whom they themselves accorded under which they must remain and thrive. They were defined by general government, not by religion, but by a forthright necessity to knowledge of public work. So the best evidence is that all God in the

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Because of globalization, the report begins, U.S. "workers in virtually every sector must now face competitors who live just a mouse-click away in Ireland, Finland, India or dozens of other nations whose economies are growing. Having reviewed the trends in the United States and abroad, the committee is deeply concerned that the scientific and technical building blocks of our economic leadership are eroding at a time when many other nations are gathering strength. We are worried about the future prosperity of the United States. We fear the abruptness with which a lead in science and technology can be lost and the difficulty of recovering a lead once lost — if indeed it can be regained

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These proposals are the new New Deal urgently called for by our times. This is where President Bush should have focused his second term, instead of squandering it on a silly, ideological jag called Social Security privatization. Because, as this report concludes, "Without a renewed effort to bolster the foundations of our competitiveness, we can expect to lose our privileged position."

Mr. Friedman's latest book is *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century*.

More Letters to the Editor

Common design sense will stop germs

This is in reference to your editorial about not washing hands after going to a public restroom.

As you enter any public restroom, there is no handle, so you can push your way in with hands or body.

As you leave after washing your hands, you are forced to grab the same handle that unwashed hands used to leave the room. This is the opposite of what it should be.

That is nothing but common sense. Better yet, swinging doors could be used in all public restrooms.

ALLAN HOUCK
Santee



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