



QUOTE OF THE DAY

“Civil nuclear cooperation with India will not lead to an arms race in South Asia.” — Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on Wednesday, defending a controversial deal to share United States nuclear technology with India.

VIEWPOINTS

U.S. needs biodefense Manhattan Project

Johns Hopkins University could be central to research

By Sens. Bill Frist and Richard Burr

One only needs to open a newspaper to read disturbing new reports about the unprecedented spread of H5N1 avian influenza. Humans have no natural immunity and are able to spread avian flu before showing symptoms. And if it begins to spread from person to person, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that avian flu could kill nearly 2 million people in the United States and tens of millions more around the world.

In light of this, it's hard to imagine that almost 40 years ago, a U.S. Surgeon General said America was winning the war on infectious disease. Even if avian flu passes without incident, the type of threat it poses won't go away. Pathogens evolve, mutate and find new lives in new hosts, in new nations and on new continents. They are only an airplane ride away. And the relative ease of acquiring dangerous pathogens makes it attractive for terrorists to release deliberately.

Over the past two years, we have worked to bolster our nation's biodefense and pandemic response capacity. We've successfully enacted legislation that provides incentives for developing new treatments and funds for building sufficient stockpiles. We've also acted to reduce the enormous liability associated with manufacturing, distributing and administering countermeasures and to provide compensation to individuals who may be seriously injured from such products.

But our nation needs to do more. Right now, there is no single authority within the federal government responsible for the advanced research and development of countermeasures. Vaccine production and drug development take years, rather than months or even weeks, and cost hundreds of millions of dollars. In the face of an imminent threat, the United States lacks the ability to rapidly increase production of potentially lifesaving drugs and vaccines. Quite simply, the problem lies in the current process. It's too risky, too expensive, and too long.



Sen. Bill Frist



Sen. Richard Burr

We need a new and bold approach — a Manhattan Project for the 21st Century — to defend against all threats, whether natural, accidental, or deliberate in origin. The Defense Department provides a potential model. For almost 50 years, the Pentagon's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) has partnered with academia and private industry on high-risk, high-reward projects that show promise but might appear too risky or expensive to stockholders and university trustees. Its work has created the Internet, key satellite technologies, unmanned aerial vehicles and countless other innovations.

To spearhead a biodefense Manhattan Project, we propose a similar innovation catalyst for the life sciences: a Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA) within the Department of Health and Human Services. BARDA would reorganize responsibilities within HHS to help the United States identify new and emerging threats and rapidly develop and manufacture countermeasures. To do so, BARDA would partner with the best scientists and engineers in the country.

As a leading center of biomedical

research, The Johns Hopkins University — the Baltimore-Washington area's largest private employer — would almost certainly stand to benefit from the creation of BARDA. And, along with Sens. Mike Enzi, Judd Gregg and Lamar Alexander, we've proposed a bill that

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would create it.

The United States stands at a decisive moment in the defense against new and emerging threats. The threat itself, from a continually evolving influenza virus to the deliberate use of deadly pathogens, will never disappear altogether. With a bold, innovative and focused research effort, we believe America can confront and overcome this challenge.

Sen. Bill Frist, a Republican from Tennessee, is U.S. Senate Majority Leader. Sen. Richard Burr, a Republican from North Carolina, is chairman of the Subcommittee on Bioterrorism and Public Health Preparedness of the Committee on Health Education, Labor and Pensions.

STEVE H. HANKE



Mexican President Vicente Fox, center, speaks alongside President Bush, right, and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper. The three leaders held a North American summit in Cancun, Mexico. - AP photo/CP, Tom Hanson

Mexico mimics Yugoslavia

Last week, Mexico's President Vicente Fox hosted President Bush and Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper in Cancun. During their two-day summit, Mr. Fox stayed "on message": Canada and the U.S. must accept even more Mexican workers and grant them more "rights." This is nothing new. Since Bush and Fox were first elected in 2000, Mr. Fox has fired a barrage of demands at the White House.

These have become part of the great immigration debate. What has not surfaced in the public discourse is the sad state of the Mexican economy and Mexico's embrace of an economic strategy lifted from Marshall Tito's Yugoslavia playbook.

Under the communists, Yugoslavia couldn't produce enough jobs to fully employ its labor force. To solve Yugoslavia's surplus labor problem, strongman Tito came up with a simple, but ingenious, economic strategy: open the borders — at least by communist standards — and export surplus labor. This plan worked like a charm. At its peak in the early 1970s, there were more than a million Yugoslavs, about 11 percent of the labor force, working in Western Europe. And the hard-money remittances (primarily German marks) that they sent back home amounted to as much as 30 percent of Yugoslavia's exports.

Like Yugoslavia, Mexico's economy is stuck in a variety of statist ruts. According to the World Bank's "Doing Business in 2006" report, Mexico's labor market is simply dysfunctional. Of the 155 countries covered by the report,

Mexico ranks 125th in terms of the difficulties faced by businesses in hiring, employing and firing workers. It's not surprising that Mexico is on a slow growth path, and that it can't produce jobs.

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productive jobs, export the labor force. As a result, more than 27 percent of Mexico's labor force is now working in the U.S. and these workers are sending home \$20 billion in remittances. That equals one-third of the total wage earnings in the formal sector of the Mexican economy and 10 percent of Mexico's exports.

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