income who would not otherwise be financially able to handle the costs of a college education or special career or technical training program.

Created in 1972, the Pell Grant originally provided significant financial support to students. In the 1976–1977 school year, the maximum Pell Grant award covered 35 percent of the average annual cost of attending a 4-year private institution, and 72 percent of the average cost of a 4-year public institution.

Today, Mr. Speaker, in spite of President Clinton's efforts over the past 3 years to boost the purchasing power of the Pell Grant, and the President deserves much credit for these efforts, but in spite of all of this, the maximum Pell Grant now pays for only one-third of the average cost of a public 4-year college, and barely one-seventh of the cost of a private college.

This sad state of affairs came about from cutbacks in Federal funding during a period of escalating college costs and tuition increases among most of the Nation's public and private colleges. I firmly believe that higher education institutions must rein in the cost of college tuition, but I am equally as firm in my belief that the Federal Government must and has to restore the value of the Federal Pell grant.

That is why I am proud to join with my colleagues, the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) and the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LEWIS) to introduce H.R. 959, the Affordable Education through Pell Grants Act of 1999.

This bill does one thing and one thing only: It raises the maximum Pell Grant award level to $6,500 for the academic year 2000 to 2001. This simple action would restore the value of the Pell Grant as originally conceived. It is twice the amount of the maximum Pell Grant award proposed by President Clinton, and it is the level of funding where the Pell Grant is meant to be.

By raising the maximum award level to $6,500, we restore the purchasing power of every Pell Grant awarded to financially needy students, and we increase the eligibility pool for Pell Grants. This has an important impact on middle-income families who face the financial burden of having more than one child in college at the same time.

Over the past 2 years, I have met many students from the Third Congressional District of Massachusetts who would not have gone to college, who would not have gone to the college of their choice, without the Federal Pell Grant program.

Bethany English, who has now graduated from Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts, has stood alongside me on presentations on the importance of Pell Grants. Jamie Hoag, from a working class family in Fall River, Massachusetts, was able to graduate from Holy Cross College in Worcester because he received a Pell Grant. It is for these young people, and all the students like them, that I urge my colleagues to restore the value of the Pell Grant.

I know many of my colleagues will say that we are asking for too much, that this is too expensive a proposition. Indeed, it will require about $11 billion more than what is currently in the President's budget for Pell Grants.

But I would say to my colleagues that education must be the Nation's number one priority. The future of our economy rests on the higher education of our children, the future of our national security rests on the higher education of our children, and the future of our communities rests on the higher education of our children, all of our children.

If we can find money in the budget to build Star Wars, then we can find the money to make stars out of our children, and to make sure that everyone with the ability to go to college can afford to go to college. If we can give billion dollar corporations special tax breaks, then we can certainly make sure that every student who has the ability to go to college gets a financial break to pay for college. If we can spend billions of dollars each year to design new nuclear weapons and new ways to make nuclear war, then we can find the money we need to increase the funding for Pell Grants.

I say to my colleagues, this is an issue of national priorities and of national interest. I urge my colleagues to join the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) and the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LEWIS) and I and cosponsor H.R. 959, and restore the power of the Pell Grant program.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. SHIMKUS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. SHIMKUS addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

IN SUPPORT OF AN INCREASE IN THE FEDERAL PELL GRANT PROGRAM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LEWIS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. LEWIS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, we are a rich and powerful Nation in the midst of strong economic growth. As we approach the 21st century, we must ask ourselves, what is our next greatest challenge? How will we target our investments to become stronger as a Nation and as a people?

I have always said, and I will continue to say, Mr. Speaker, that there is no greater challenge and nothing that is more important than the education of our next generation. We do not have a person to waste. Every student in this Nation who wants to go to college, no matter how rich or poor, should have the opportunity to go. Education is a great equalizer. A good education can shine the light of hope and opportunity in every corner of our Nation, no matter how poor, how hopeless, or how downtrodden.

For nearly 30 years Pell Grants have been the key that have unlocked the American dream. For millions of American students who had the talent, had the desire, but lacked the funds, the Pell Grant made the difference between college and a dead end job.

In the last decade, the cost for college has increased at rates of 5 to 8 percent, outpacing inflation and putting a college education further out of reach for those who can least afford it. Until recently, the size of the maximum Pell Grant stayed the same.

Two years ago, many of my colleagues and I, along with the President, fought for and won the largest increase in the Pell Grant in 20 years. That brought the maximum Pell Grant up from $2,700 to $3,000.

Mr. Speaker, we can even do better. Today's Pell Grant provides only 35 percent of the average cost of a 4-year State college. Too few families today can afford to write a check for $10,000 to cover tuition for State schools, and for so many families, private education is out of the question.

Mr. Speaker, I remember growing up in rural Alabama in the forties and fifties. My family could never have afforded the college tuition at Harvard, Yale, or even the University of Georgia. For so many of us, college was a distant dream, a pipe dream. Without the help of financial aid or work study, we could never have afforded to go to college.

We have come a long way in opening the doors of college for all Americans, but we can do better. We can do more. For this reason, I am joining my colleague, the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MCGOVERN) and the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) in sponsoring legislation that will raise the maximum authorized Pell Grant to a level that reflects the rising cost of college.

I ask all of my colleagues to join me and my colleagues, the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MCGOVERN) and the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS), in making education a priority, and to ensure that in the days of economic prosperity, no one but no one is left out or left behind.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. GUTKNECHT addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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CONGRESS MUST DOUBLE PELL GRANT FUNDING

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to join with the gentleman

from Massachusetts (Mr. MCGOVERN) and the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LEWIS) on this extremely important piece of legislation.

In my State of Vermont, and I believe all over this country, one of the great concerns that the middle class has is the high cost of college education. Everybody knows that in order for our young people to earn a decent living, it is increasingly imperative that they have a college degree. And, at the same time, everybody also knows that the cost of a college education is soaring. It is soaring in the State of Vermont. It is soaring all over the United States of America.

So we have folks in the middle class who are working longer and longer hours to keep their heads above water, and then they look at what the local college or the good colleges in this country are asking and they say, ''How am I, who makes $20,000 to $25,000, or $30,000 a year, or $40,000 a year, going to be able to afford to send my kid to college, when the best schools in this country now cost over $30,000 a year and many cost $15,000, $20,000 or $25,000?''

And what happens if they have two kids or three kids? How can they afford to send their kids to college?

The answer is, it is increasingly difficult for those families. So we have the outrage that all over this country millions of young people are unable to go to college, or are unable to go to the college of their choice, because they cannot afford it.

Mr. Speaker, this is absurd. It is not only unfair to the young person. It is unfair to the family. It is unfair to this Nation.

What an absurd policy it is that we waste the human intellectual potential of millions and millions of people who want a higher education. How absurd it is that in the global economy we throw in the towel to competitive nations and say we are not going to have the most competitive, best-educated workforce in the world.

What kind of stupidity is that? What kind of an absurd sense of national priorities is it that says that we can afford to spend huge sums of money on B–2 bombers, that we can give tax breaks to billionaires, but we are not going to help the working families and the middle class of this country be able to afford to send their kids to college?

Now, I know that many of the people in the Congress understand that in countries throughout the world, in Great Britain, in Scandinavia, in Germany, in France, the cost of a college education is not $30,000 a year, it is not $20,000 a year, it is not $10,000 a year. In many cases, it is zero, because those countries understand that it is a very wise investment to make sure that as many of their young people as possible can get a college education. We should learn something from that.

Mr. Speaker, what the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MCGOVERN) and the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LEWIS) and I would like to do is to double the amount of money we are spending on Pell Grants.

Some people may say doubling that is a lot of money, $7.5 billion a year more. That is three B–2 bombers. There are people in both the Democratic and Republican parties who want to increase military spending by well over $100 billion in the next 6 years. We give, as a Nation, $125 billion a year in corporate welfare to large corporations who do not need that money. There are people on the floor of this House now who are saying Bill Gates needs a tax break. Billionaires need a tax break.

Mr. Speaker, if we can spend billions on corporate welfare, billions on wasteful military spending, billions on tax breaks for those who do not need it, we can certainly afford $7.5 billion a year more for the working families of this country so that we can move toward that day when every person in this country, young, middle-aged, old, will be able to get the higher education they need.

This is a smart investment for America. I congratulate the gentleman from Massachusetts and the gentleman from Georgia for their work on this, and I will do my best to see that it passes.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. ENGLISH) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. ENGLISH addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

SUPPORT THE READY CREDIT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. NETHERCUTT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. NETHERCUTT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address the needs of small businesses who employ America's dedicated Air and Army National Guard Reservists. Mounting numbers of contingency operations have pulled ever greater numbers of reservists out of the private sector and into full-time military service. I have introduced legislation, which is numbered H.R. 803, to cushion the blow of these reserve call-ups on small businesses.

The end strength of our Armed Forces has fallen by more than 1 million personnel since 1988, even as military contingency operations have increased to historically high levels. We have only been able to sustain this operations tempo because of an increasingly heavy reliance on reservists.

Total so-called ''man days'' contributed by reservists have nearly tripled since 1992, to over 13 million days. Without the services of these citizen soldiers, we would need an additional force of nearly 50,000 soldiers to maintain overseas commitments.

Mr. Speaker, reservists are willing to do their duty and serve when they are called, but increasingly frequent deployments have placed a new strain on reserve-employer relations. Most businesses are fully supportive of the military obligations of their employees, but even the most enthusiastic civilian employers are hard hit when their staff is sent overseas for months at a time, only to have the person return home and be called up again.

Evidence from the National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve suggests that the strain is increasing, resulting in a greater number of inquiries on the rights and responsibilities of employers.

Research by the Air Force Reserve has also demonstrated that the problem is growing. While only 3.5 percent of Air Force reservists indicated ''serious'' employer support problems, another 31 percent reported some degree of problems with employers. Of these reservists, 10 percent are considering leaving because of employer support problems. But the true magnitude of the problem is likely greatly understated as there is no comprehensive survey that is used to consistently evaluate reserve-employer relationships.

Now, the expense to small businesses of doing without a valued employee, or hiring and training a temporary replacement, is significant and the loss of productivity is equally difficult.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation, H.R. 803, would provide employers with a tax credit to compensate for employee participation in the individual ready reserves. Specifically, the legislation provides a credit equal to 50 percent of the amount of compensation that would have been paid to an employee during the time that that employee participates in contingency operations supporting missions in Bosnia and Southwest Asia.

The total allowable credit for each individual employee may not exceed $2,000, or a maximum of $7,500 for all employees. The legislation also extends the credit for self-employed individuals. The credit would offset at least some of the expense that reserve employers face and reduce tensions with employees.

Now, this legislation is only one step towards resolving a complex problem. It does not address the serious needs of public sector employees who can be impacted by contingencies as much as businesses. More important, it does not address the high operations tempo that is exacerbating reserve-employer relations and driving personnel out of the reserves. But I do think this bill is timely for it addresses two of the most pressing issues of the 106th Congress: taxes and military readiness.

Mr. Speaker, as Congress discusses proposals to reduce the tax burden on Americans, we must give serious thought to small businesses who have lost valued employees to overseas military operations. As we discuss pay and benefit packages for the active duty military, we must not forget the citizen soldiers who are the backbone of