

Don't limit opportunity

The fundamental challenge in balancing the federal budget is preserving the nation's economic strengths and core values. The measure of their success in maintaining the nation's priorities will not be known for years to come. As a result, some may be tempted to ignore long-term consequences for immediate budget relief, a mistake the nation cannot afford.

A case in point is federal student aid. Various proposals on both sides of the aisle would slash spending for programs that provide access, choice, and opportunity for millions of low- and moderate-income Americans. The Pell Grant Program, long considered politically untouchable, is on the chopping block. It is almost certain that the fiscal 2012 budget will reduce the Pell Grant maximum award or limit eligibility. This and other budgetary proposals, if enacted, would reduce access and stifle opportunities for millions of Americans who rely on federal aid to fulfill their dreams.

Many claim we cannot balance our federal budget and put the nation on a sustainable fiscal path unless we control these costs. In reality, 40 percent of the growth in the Pell Grant Program over the past three years is due to the recent recession, as the unemployed and under-employed are enrolling in programs to improve their employability. Isn't this the appropriate response to improve our nation's strength and competitiveness? Should we cut ourselves out of this global recession or should we build the intellectual capital necessary to lead, grow and prosper?

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