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Graduate-Level Scholarships Aim at 'Mission-Critical' Jobs

By Stephen Barr
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To help the government attract scientists, doctors, economists and other highly skilled professionals, two House members yesterday introduced a bill that would create graduate-level scholarships for students who commit to public service.

Recipients of the awards would be called Roosevelt Scholars, named for [Theodore Roosevelt](#), the president widely considered to be the father of the modern civil service.

Reps. [David E. Price](#) (D-N.C.) and [Christopher Shays](#) (R-Conn.) teamed up to introduce the legislation, aimed at making the government more competitive in hiring for what the bill calls "mission-critical positions."

About a third of the government's seasoned professional and technical employees will likely retire in the next five years, according to projections by the [Office of Personnel Management](#). The baby-boom retirements come as Labor Department forecasts show the nation's workforce growing at a slower pace, setting off keen competition for talent in the public, private and nonprofit sectors.

"In the face of a dwindling professional workforce, we must act now to recruit the scientists, engineers and other high-level experts who make our government work," Price said. "Our initiative would mobilize the country's colleges and universities to address this very acute challenge."

Shays, noting that the cost of college continues to rise, said the government needs to "provide resources, like tuition assistance, in order for these jobs to compete with the salaries available to top-notch employees in the private sector."

The Roosevelt Scholars program would provide tuition, room and board, and a stipend for graduate study, up to \$60,000 for an academic year. In exchange, scholarship recipients would be required to serve an internship in a federal agency and, upon graduation, serve at least three years in the government.

The bill would provide \$10 million in initial funding to establish a nonprofit foundation to manage the scholarships. The foundation would be expected to build an endowment and become self-sustaining over time.

One of the leading supporters of the scholarship has been the Partnership for Public Service, a District-based nonprofit group that sponsors research on the civil service and promotes efforts to improve the government's recruitment strategies.

Max Stier, the partnership's president, said that the military has attracted talented young Americans through officer training programs on college campuses and that the Roosevelt scholarship program "is, in essence, a [ROTC](#) program for civilians."

The scholarships also would lend prestige to the civil service, Stier said.

"The intent here is to create a brand as attractive and as powerful as the most elite out there," he said.

Shays also is a co-sponsor of legislation that would create a U.S. Public Service Academy, modeled after the [U.S. military](#) academies. It would offer free education to undergraduates in exchange for their pledge to work for five years in local, state or federal government jobs.