

# OPINIONS

## Peace dividend must be used to help students' education

Some of you may have heard about the "peace dividend," the tens of billions of dollars which, now that the Cold War is over, were going to flow into education, health care, environmental protection, nutrition programs, housing, and other areas of desperate concern.

Tragically, as a result of President Bush's desire to maintain a much higher than necessary military budget, and collusion between many Republicans and some conservative Democrats, there will be virtually no peace dividend.

The President and a majority of the members of Congress have determined that spending over a hundred billion dollars a year to defend Western Europe and Japan against a non-existent enemy is more important than feeding our five million hungry children; that funding Star Wars and other unnecessary weapons systems is more important than building housing for the homeless, or providing funding for the 85 million Americans who lack adequate health insurance.

What does the struggle over the "peace dividend" mean for college students in Vermont and throughout the nation? On March 26, the House of Representatives passed the Higher Education Re-authorization Bill, HR 3553, which greatly expands programs for low and middle income students. While this bill is far from perfect it could go a long way toward making sure that every American would have the opportunity for a higher edu-

cation regardless of the wealth of his or her family.

The bill greatly increases the number of Pell grants available to middle class students, and also expands the access of federal loan programs to students from middle class families. All parents, regardless of income, would be able to borrow any amount up to the total cost of college under the PLUS program, and the interest cap for PLUS loans would be reduced from 12% to 10%.

Many more families would be eligible for Stafford Loans and the annual family income eligibility standard would be raised to \$78,500.

At the present time 95% of Pell Grants are awarded to students whose family income is under \$30,000, and 70% of the recipients come from families whose yearly income is under \$15,000.

Expansion of this program is therefore of vital importance to students who traditionally have not been able to afford higher education. The new legislation more than doubles the maximum award to low income students under a Pell Grant, from \$2100 to \$4500.

It is my strong belief that the federal government should help finance the education of those who are willing to perform public services after graduation from college, and so I am especially pleased that the new legislation contains amendments to the Perkins Loan Program which forgive repayment for Perkins

Loans to students who teach in public schools where one third of the students are under the poverty line, to teachers of young children with disabilities, to nurses and medical technicians, and to social workers who serve families with high-risk children.

I was proud to support this legislation, which authorized the federal government to offer more assistance to students. Without access to higher education, young Americans cannot seize the opportunities that life can and should offer them. Without an educated work force, this nation would not be able to compete in the global market

place of the twenty-first century.

Will this progressive and important piece of legislation go into effect? Probably not. As a result of President Bush's threatened veto, and the weakness of Congress, the choice has been made that guns are more important than education, that nuclear weapons are more important than Pell Grants.

Tragically, millions of students who want a college education will not be able to receive one.

While both houses of Congress have passed this important legislation, the defeat of the

"peace dividend" means that there will not be adequate funds available to pay for it. As a result it is likely that the increases in Pell Grants and student loans that this bill offered will be cut back or eliminated entirely during the appropriations debates of the next few months. It is even possible that there will be a reduction in federal aid to student assistance programs.

Where do we go from here? Clearly, while we continue today to fight as hard as we can for full funding for student assistance programs, we must also look at the broader political pic-

ture, and the need for a new set of national priorities. We must elect a President and a Congress who understand that the war to be fought now is not the Cold War, but the war at home against homelessness, despair, and the decline in our standard of living.

I hope that students will stand up for their rights and join me in fighting for full funding for education. I hope also that they will become politically active in the struggle for a new America, one which provides justice and economic opportunity for all.

U.S. Representative  
Bernard Sanders

## Exercise your right to vote this year

The next President of the United States will gain the vote of approximately 25.5% of the eligible voters in this country. This is assuming that the recent trend of approximately half of the country's voters actually turning out continues, and figuring that the victor will gain approximately 51% of what the pundits euphemistically refer to as the popular vote.

As Americans it is the duty of each and every member of the Middlebury College community to register and, more importantly to actually vote. This is more than a privilege, it is an imperative, the legacy of those "inalienable rights" which we all hold so dear, but so easily take for granted.

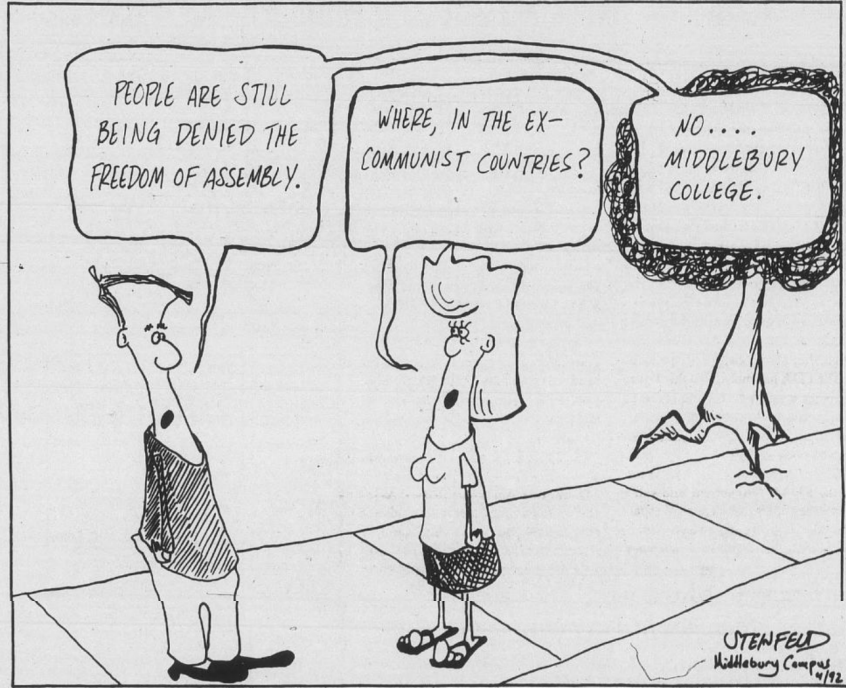
College students are an untapped electoral resource whose voice does not match its size. In the 1988 Presidential contest, approximately 20% of all college students voted (incidentally, of those who did vote, 80% voted Democrat). Were this figure to grow, the resulting group of new voters would cause a decisive shift in the election that would change the way politicians look at students. As a group, we College students hold in our hands the power to hand the election to whichever candidate we choose.

I know many people argue that there is not one worth voting for: Bill Clinton is a little too slick for his own good, and George Bush is, well, George

Bush. But that is no excuse for apathy. A lack of satisfying political leadership should be a greater impetus to involve oneself in the functioning of our government, for as Chester Bowles observed, "Government is too big and important to be left to the politicians." For those of you who would object that the two party system is itself the problem, I remind you that we live in a state with a Socialist Congressman. Furthermore, we must not forget that many people are giving the possible candidacy of H. Ross Perot serious thought.

Even if one does not like the slate of candidates, one should vote anyway. It is irresponsible to let our system of government die due to atrophy; even if there is something inherently wrong with the system, as some cynics would have us believe. George McGovern put it best when he said that "Having discovered an illness, it's not terribly useful to prescribe death as a cure."

There are many on this campus who would claim that this school is politically apathetic, and they would no doubt give themselves as examples of people who are bored by politics (of course, they are probably not reading this editorial). This is a myth. It is true that the words politics, Democrat, Republican, etc. cause eyes to glaze over faster than most boring 8:15's, but that is because people refuse to get past these catch



words.

The average Middlebury student definitely has specific views on such issues as the environment and abortion to name a few. When someone states their views on these issues, or any others, they have suddenly caused a strange transformation in themselves; they have done something political! Anyone who says that politics does not interest them is either playing a wonderful semantic trick on themselves or simply has no opinions.

In the coming weeks, the Middlebury College Democrats will be conducting voter registration on various sites on the Campus. It is your obligation to your country, and more importantly to yourself, to register to vote and exercise that right on November 3, whether it is for Democrat, Republican, or Independent.

If I may end by paraphrasing Robert Kennedy: "Each time a person votes, he sends forth a tiny ripple, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest political machine."

Middlebury College  
Democrats

## Unity will conquer the night

After "Take Back The Night," I returned to my dorm and attempted to describe the intensity of the event to a friend, but it was a struggle. I have heard others describe it as *moving* or *amazing*, and certainly what was shared was just that, but anyone who was there last Thursday night knows that there is not really a word to accurately explain what was felt in that room.

*The night had been indescribable and empowering and now I was hit with somebody questioning whether or not any men had attended this "chick event" — as he put it.*

In my futile attempt to try to relate the power of what had gone on, I was asked, by a male, "Were there any men there?" I am sure that my anger with such a question was obvious. The night had been indescribable and empowering and now I was hit with somebody questioning whether or not any men had attended this "chick event" — as he put it.

What kind of question is that anyway? Yes, there were men

there. I am frustrated that anyone would believe anything differently. What is more, the men at "Take Back The Night" were not passive. They talked and shared their experiences in addition to providing support for the other people who attended.

The whole episode reminded me of another support group for eating disorders related issues not too long ago. There were many women at this group, but

ing events such as "Take Back The Night." If it is intimidating to be in an all female group (as I have heard before), bring a few friends. The women who are at gatherings such as these appreciate and respect those men who are involving themselves much more than most people realize. What is frustrating is that there are so few men involved.

However, it almost seems warped to me that men involved in women's issues are so readily appreciated. They are simply doing what they ought to do. The world is fifty-four percent women. This means that roughly one half of the interactions in a man's life will be with women. I would think that it would be in any man's best interest to somewhat educate himself about women's issues, and to attend such events as "Take Back The Night."

Through educating ourselves in issues that relate to others, whether it is gender, race, class, or sexuality, it seems we can begin to bridge the gap that is created by a lack of understanding. But, I imagine, if you attended, this is not something that you need to hear. You already know.

Elizabeth J. Fisher '96