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# OPINION

## Student Debt Means Fewer Public Servants

Trained for non-profit but hard to pay the bills

BY ALYSSA AQUINO

Cum laude, my diploma reads — “with honor.” But cum debitum, “with debt,” is a bit more accurate.



Collectively, America’s student borrowers owe \$1.7 trillion. On average, each graduating senior this year is beginning their life around \$37,000 in the hole.

That looks like a lot, but when you’re living with student debt, you look at that number and don’t even flinch. The debt is so normal it’s like an inside joke for pretty much everyone in my generation. Except we’re the punch line.

I graduated class of 2015 from a private, liberal arts college — a “most selective” one, U.S. News and World Report assures me. It was also an expensive degree, Sallie Mae reminds me. Monthly.

Yes, I chose to go to a private, expensive college. There was a calculus there, and one part of it was “I liked the feeling of it.”

I know, this type of sentiment

tal idealism is a privilege. It’s no surprise I came out with the equally sentimental notion that I wanted to do non-profit work — which makes it that much harder to pay those loan bills.

It’s baffling to my Filipino parents. They didn’t cross the ocean and consign themselves to discrimination and demeaning jobs because they liked the “feel of it” — or even on the promise that their lives would be better. They did it on the promise that my life would be better. And that I wouldn’t owe anyone anything.

They could live underwater, they decided — but they at least expected their children to take a breath of fresh air. Well, sometimes it feels like the air is polluted. And the water is teeming with loan sharks.

So much so that some companies — among them many banks, financial institutions, and other large for-profit businesses — have begun including student loan repayment assistance in their salary packages.

I have to admit it’s tempting, especially since the Trump administration wants to end a federal program that would forgive the student loans of people who commit to public service work.

What’s the alternative, after all?

Having a non-profit career in something you care about can require years of barely remunerated labor: an unpaid internship, volunteer work, a

have children — since you don’t want to deal with their student debt either.

It’s not surprising to me that some of my classmates decide to return to school — maybe if they add more letters to their de-

generation of people trained to enter the public service entering Wall Street instead?

What a loss.

This is just one facet of the student debt crisis — others include putting off starting a fam-

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minimum-wage second job, or a salary that barely meets the threshold for a living wage.

Prioritizing a career in something you care about, in addition to paying rent and groceries, requires consigning yourself to a debt you’ll live with until you have children. That is, if you

gree they’ll magically land a job they’re passionate about with a salary that can pay the bills.

It’s also not surprising that some of my peers decide to join the other side, cashing in on connections and scooping up those high-paying corporate jobs. But what happens when you have a

ily or buying a home. Too many of us are saddled with debt, and too many of us are structuring our lives around this ledger.

*Alyssa Aquino is a Next Leader at the Institute for Policy Studies. Distributed by OtherWords.org*

## Political Showdown with the Nine Nuclear Powers

A treaty to ban all nuclear weapons

BY TOM H. HASTINGS

We have been living with nuclear weapons for 72 years, so that must make them safe and sustainable, right?

Wrong.

Nuclear weapons are the only way we have of killing most humans on Earth in the space of a few hours—far more immediately than global climate chaos, which is itself a dire threat. Indeed, reliable astroscintists assure us that they predict no giant meteor collisions nor anything else that can wreck life on Earth for at least millennia, except the ultimate self-inflicted nuclear apocalypse.

Most of humankind understands this. Most of humankind is not defended in any conceivable fashion by the godawful weapons

in the arsenals of just nine of the 200 nations on Earth.

That is why we are witnessing a political showdown between the overwhelming majority of the planet’s countries and the nine nuclear powers.

Oh, you hadn’t heard about this conflict? That is hardly surprising in our strange media and political atmosphere of random bellicose presidential tweets, votes on whether to slash healthcare for our most vulnerable citizens, and narcissistic speeches to the bewildered Boy Scouts. Not to mention the deranged cockfight environment we are witnessing inside the inner circle in the oddest, most dysfunctional White House in U.S. history.

Far more meaningful in the long arc of human history and certainly in our hopes for future generations is the recently passed treaty to ban all nuclear weapons on Earth.

Yes, there have been sidelong,

kick-the-warhead-down-the-time-line attempts before, including the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty, the 1970 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, the stalled Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, but now comes a full frontal legal and worldwide political assault on the enemy of the generations, nukes.

And we have seen successful treaties to outlaw both biological weapons (1972) and chemical weapons (1992), neither of which have ever been capable of the immediate and long term threat to life locked and loaded in the arsenals of just nine nations.

Naturally, it is the world v. nuclear weapons nation-states, plus a few nations who don’t have nukes but whose economic and political arms have been twisted, primarily by the US.

The 72 years since the atomic annihilation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is nothing more than a quick eye blink in the long span of human history and prehistory. Nukes are a single incident away

from wrecking your life, your great-grandchildren’s lives, and those of everyone else. They are now officially criminal and have always been evil.

Now is the most opportune time ever to let your federal elected officials know that we stand with the

vast majority of people on planet Earth. It’s time. Sign that treaty and get it ratified. Save the world, literally.

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