We need a new and bold approach — a Manhattan Project for the 21st Century — to defend against all threats, whether natural, accidental, or deliberate in origin. The Defense Department provides a potential model. For almost 50 years, the Pentagon’s Defense Advanced Projects Research Agency (DARPA) has partnered with academia and private industry on high-risk, high-reward projects that show promise but might appear too risky or expensive to stockholders and university trustees. Its work has created the Internet, key satellite technologies, unmanned aerial vehicles and countless other innovations.

To spearhead a biodefense Manhattan Project, we propose a similar innovation catalyst for the life sciences: a Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA) within the Department of Health and Human Services. BARDA would reorganize responsibilities within HHS to help the United States identify new and emerging threats and rapidly develop and manufacture countermeasures.

research, The Johns Hopkins University — the Baltimore-Washington area’s largest private employer — would almost certainly stand to benefit from the creation of BARDA. And, along with Sens. Mike Enzi, Judd Gregg and Lamar Alexander, we’ve proposed a bill that would create it.

The United States stands at a decisive moment in the defense against new and emerging threats. The threat itself, from a continually evolving influenza virus to the deliberate use of deadly pathogens, will never disappear altogether. With a bold, innovative and focused research effort, we believe America can confront and overcome this challenge.

Sens. Bill Frist, a Republican from Tennessee, is U.S. Senate Majority Leader. Sen. Richard Burr, a Republican from North Carolina, is chairman of the Subcommittee on Bioterrorism and Public Health Preparedness of the Committee on Health Education, Labor and Pensions.

STEVE H. HANKE

Mexico mimics Yugoslavia

L ast week, Mexico’s President Vicente Fox hosted President Bush and Canada’s Prime Minister Stephen Harper in Cancun. During their two-day summit, Mr. Fox stayed “on message”: Canada and the U.S. must accept even more Mexican workers and grant them more “rights.” This is nothing new. Since Bush and Fox were first elected in 2000, Mr. Fox has fired a barrage of demands at the White House.

These have become part of the great immigration debate. What has not surfaced in the public discourse is the sad state of the Mexican economy and Mexico’s embrace of an economic strategy lifted from Marshall Tito’s Yugoslavia playbook.

Under the communists, Yugoslavia couldn’t produce enough jobs to fully employ its labor force. To solve Yugoslavia’s surplus labor problem, strongman Tito came up with a simple, but ingenious, economic nationalism: open the borders — at least by communist standards — and let workers export their labor. The plan worked like a charm. At its peak in the early 1970s, there were more than a million Yugoslavs, about 11 percent of the labor force, working in Western Europe. And the hard-money remittances (primarily German marks) that they sent back home amounted to as much as 30 percent of Yugoslavia’s exports.

Like Yugoslavia, Mexico’s economy is stuck in a variety of statist ruts. According to the World Bank’s “Doing Business in 2006” report, Mexico’s labor market is simply dysfunctional. Of the 155 countries covered by the report, Mexico ranks 125th in terms of the difficulties faced by businesses in hiring, employing and firing workers. It’s not surprising that Mexico is on a slow growth path, and that it can’t produce jobs. Rather than modernize the economy, Mexico’s politicians have embraced a Tito-inspired strategy: When incapable of fostering productive jobs, export the labor force. As a result, more than 27 percent of Mexico’s labor force is now working in the U.S. and these workers are sending home $20 billion in remittances. That equals one-third of the total wage earnings in the formal sector of the Mexican economy and 10 percent of Mexico’s exports.

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STEVE H. HANKE

Mexican President Vicente Fox, center, speaks alongside President Bush, right, and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper. The three leaders held a North American summit in Cancun, Mexico. — AP photo/CP, Tom Hanson

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Civil nuclear cooperation with India will not lead to an arms race in South Asia.” — Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on Wednesday, defending a controversial deal to share United States nuclear technology with India.