

Princeton ignoring government's need, donors' wishes

BY WILLIAM ROBERTSON

Question: Which of the following doesn't belong? China, Iran, Iraq, Israel, ivory-billed woodpecker, Mexico?

The answer would seem obvious. At Princeton University, however, it may be less obvious. And that's created a serious problem — both for it and for our country. While global turmoil threatens U.S. security and prosperity, the Princeton professional school intended to help the United States deal with international challenges is focusing on other matters, such as wildlife preservation.

The federal government, meanwhile, faces an additional problem: 52 percent of the government's civilian work force will be eligible to retire in the next five years. As U.S. News & World Report put it recently, this means Washington needs to "snag a new generation of

enthusiastic, dedicated workers" and "plug the coming brain drain."

In a perfect world, my family might be able to offer some assistance: Over the next 10 years, the charitable foundation my parents established will provide some \$300 million to prepare top graduate students at Princeton for government foreign affairs and international relations positions. But things are never as simple as they seem.

When my parents established the foundation in 1961 with an anonymous \$35 million gift (\$220 million in today's dollars), their ultimate goal was to "strengthen the government of the United States and increase its ability and determination to defend and extend freedom throughout the world," they said.

They instructed the foundation's trustees to use the funds "for the training and education of men and women for government service — with particular emphasis on — those areas of the federal government that

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are concerned with international relations and affairs."

One more thing: My father was a proud alumnus of Princeton University. The gift was to be used specifically to prepare graduate students at Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs for appropriate government careers.

The value of my parents' gift has increased tremendously over the past 40-plus years, to more than \$650 million. This has enabled Princeton to provide some 1,800 students with a virtual free ride through the Wilson School graduate program. Indeed, since the original gift, Princeton has spent some \$330 million of the foundation's money. Yet, according to the best available information, fewer than 200 program graduates — over the course of

more than four decades — have pursued relevant government employment, even for a few years.

To those of us close to the situation, the reason is apparent: Princeton doesn't much care about the program's mission or success. That would explain why money from this designated program has been used for many years to subsidize the work of professors whose interests lie elsewhere, such as a professor of ecology and evolutionary biology whose area of expertise is the ivory-billed woodpecker and Utah prairie dog.

Saving endangered species is a noble cause, but it has little to do with international relations.

Every year, Wilson School graduates should be competing with graduates of Georgetown, George Washington University, Harvard, Johns

Hopkins, Tufts and other top schools for government positions. But as a general rule, they don't. In 2003, a reported 46 percent of the graduates of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government went to work for Uncle Sam. By contrast, the Wilson School — which received more than \$30 million from the Robertson Foundation that year — may have sent 10 graduates into government.

For four decades, Princeton has been taking the Robertson Foundation's money, while ignoring the Robertson Foundation's mission.

Princeton University has ignored its duty. My sisters and I are determined to see that our parents' money is used as intended: To help America defend and extend freedom throughout the world.

William Robertson, a 1972 Princeton graduate, is the lead plaintiff in a lawsuit seeking to end Princeton's control of the Robertson Foundation and its endowment. The case goes to trial next year.