

U.S. Rep.: Best Jobs May Soon Be Found Overseas

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Tennessee Congressman Bart Gordon demands more reliable data on the effects of offshoring on the tech work force, and urges science and technology workers to acquire skills that will differentiate them from foreign competitors.

In a article in the Spring issue of *Issues in Science and Technology*, Congressman Bart Gordon, chair of the house Committee on Science and Technology, lambasted the education system for not giving students the solid grounding in math and science needed to succeed in engineering careers.

Gordon based his critique on reports from the National Academies, Electronic Industries Alliance and the Council on Competitiveness that argue that the United States is in danger of falling behind the economic competition of the 21st century.

"Unless the United States maintains its edge in innovation, which is founded on a well-trained creative work force, the best jobs may soon be found overseas. If current trends continue, along with a lack of action, today's children may grow up with a lower standard of living than their parents," wrote Gordon, urging Congress to consider it its central goal to provide quality jobs.

Gordon argues that while the number of scientists and engineers being educated in China and India increases and broadband allows networks to access talent from wherever it exists the U.S. will become more

unprepared to compete. Citing the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress), he points out that very few students perform at the proficient level in math and science.

Out-of-field teachers are also to blame for the failures of math and science education, Gordon writes, as well as a lack of quality recruits. He calls the high student attrition rate in undergraduate STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education a "serious problem."

"In most instances, attrition is not because of an inability to perform academically, but because of a loss of interest and enthusiasm," wrote Gordon.

However, Gordon put the most energy into addressing issues of supply versus demand, noting that there is disagreement and uncertainty about whether the current supply and demand for tech workers is in balance.

"The supply part of the equation centers on whether our education system is motivating and preparing a sufficient number of students to pursue training in these fields and whether the country will be able to continue to attract talented foreign students to fill openings in the S&T work force, a third of which is currently made up of individuals from abroad," said Gordon, adding that the demand side of the equation is clouded by increasing evidence that technical jobs are migrating from the United States.

Gordon likens the migration of high tech jobs to what happened in the manufacturing sector over the last 20 years. Lower production costs and wages lured manufacturing jobs offshore, and the same is happening to the high tech sector where it is likely that the offshoring trends will accelerate the migration of jobs.

Gordon, a representative from Tennessee, made three recommendations. The first is to gather more reliable and complete data on the effects of offshoring on the science and technology work force. In the second recommendation, he urged U.S. science and technology workers to acquire skills that will differentiate them from their foreign competitors.

Finally, he implored educational systems to make careers in science and technology more appealing to students.

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