



A search for jobs in some of the wrong places

By Richard Florida

President Bush's plans to generate jobs by giving greater emphasis to math and science education and injecting more money into research in the physical sciences have much to commend them.

But our political leaders are missing the bigger picture. Though it's crucial to invest in math, science and engineering, as the president outlined in his recent State of the Union address, there are other fields that hold more promise.

While the U.S. economy will add more than one million computer and engineering jobs, health care and education are expected to generate more than three times as many jobs, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Prefer a more artistic career? Our economy is poised to create new forms of entertainment, from rock 'n' roll and hip-hop to film and video games. Indeed, over the next 10 years, jobs in art, music, culture and entertainment will grow twice as many as jobs in engineering will.

Creative-sector boomlet

In a broader creative sector, the United States will add 10 million jobs over the next decade. These jobs require knowledge and ingenuity, and span fields from science, technology and entrepreneurship, to art, design and entertainment to finance, law and health care.

From 1980 until 2014, the creative sector will generate more jobs than in manufacturing and other blue collar work today.

Prefer interacting with people? Another field with increasing job potential is the service economy, which includes retail salespeople, food-service workers, customer-service representatives and waiters and waitresses. Yet the president failed to mention this sector. Perhaps that is because these jobs pay a third of those salaries in the "creative economy" and half of what manufacturing workers make.

As the country loses another half million high-paying manufacturing jobs to automation, improved efficiency and outsourcing, our labor market is splitting into

two economic classes: high-skilled, high-paying creative work and lower-paying service work. More research spending or improved math and science education would not be enough to address the growing failure of our economy to replace high-paying blue-collar jobs with high-paying work for less-skilled people.

Improve service sector

To truly generate good jobs, the president must make the service economy a centerpiece of his agenda. It means getting beyond the conventional wisdom that all service jobs are condemned to low pay and poor working conditions.

The service economy is in the midst of a revolution. Our retailing giants increasingly dominate global markets. An increasing number — such as Starbucks, Whole Foods, REI and Best Buy — are dramatically improving pay, benefits and working conditions to harness the creativity and ingenuity of their workforce to make their processes more efficient and serve customers better.

The president needs to devise ways to learn from these companies to upgrade the pay and working conditions of the more than 5 million service-sector jobs that will be created in the next decade.

In a global economy where software coding and innovative computing can be outsourced, the United States can remain at the economic cutting edge only by continuing to be a world leader in cultural production, design, education and the service sector.

Acting now to expand meaningful, creative work across our entire economy is essential if we are to achieve the kind of competitiveness that engages many more people, unleashes their full talents, and results in lasting prosperity.

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