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Education as an Economic Driver
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A long line of economists, some of them Nobel prize winners, have proven that the quality of human capital, meaning basically the amount of education the work force has, is a major driver of economic growth. Thirty years ago, the average American worker had more education than workers in any other country in the industrialized world. Since then, one nation after another has overtaken us.

Differences in the amount of education and training among individuals are accounting for increasing differences in personal income as well as national income, and employability. This is because labor markets now cut across nations, meaning that growing numbers of large and even some small employers all over the world can source their employees anywhere on the globe they want to. Everything else being equal, when faced with a choice between two equally skilled and educated workers, they will take the cheaper one. One thing that is making this possible is the fact that more and more work is being done on computers and being sent to the next worker or to the machine that cranks out the product or to the final customer by Internet, so it really does not matter where the worker is.

Generally, the highest skills are in the greatest demand and the lowest are in surplus, which drives the wages of the highest skilled up and the wages of the lowest skilled down and creates an increasing number of job openings among the higher skilled and a declining number of openings among the lower skilled in high wage countries like our own.

In the United States, more jobs by far are lost to automation than outsourcing. Most of those jobs entail some kind of routine work, work that can be captured in an algorithm. Jobs that cannot be captured in an algorithm tend to be jobs that require more education and training.

So yes, there is a connection between skills and jobs and it is growing tighter every day. A great national education system does not guarantee full employment and high wages, but a poor one guarantees a poor economy and a low standard of living for all but a few.

Because this recession began with a collapse of the housing market, it has had a particularly devastating effect on school budgets, because schools are largely funded with real estate taxes. About 80 percent of school budgets are accounted for by teachers'

compensation. So teachers are right in the bull's-eye of this financial crisis. But it is not just the current teachers who are affected. Consider what incentive young people making career choices have to go into teaching. It used to be that young people making career choices looked at teaching as one of the most secure jobs in the United States. Newly marrieds figured that if he lost his job, she would have one if she went into teaching and the family would be all right. Now teaching turns out to be one of the most vulnerable jobs of all. If young people choose teaching now, they know they'll have a terrible time getting a job and a worse time keeping it. Teachers' starting pay is in the basement and their benefits are a major target of the budget cutters. If the United States does not do something about this, we will condemn a generation of our students to being taught by teachers who believed that the only professional school they could get into was a teachers college. Stemming the tide of that disaster, as the President has proposed, will not turn that situation around, but it will ameliorate it, and that is well worth doing.

Putting money into the pockets of school teachers and the people who build and maintain school buildings will create jobs where none were before or prevent jobs from going on the chopping block. So far so good. But that would be true for any jobs in the economy. The advantage in creating and preserving jobs in the education sector is that it will prevent a serious decline in the amount and quality of the education of the average American worker, and may even increase it, and there is a great deal of evidence that that may be the single most important thing we can do to prevent a steady slide toward increasing unemployment and lowered wages in the long haul.