

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of Science and Technology Policy

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**Statement by Neal Lane,
Assistant to the President for Science and Technology,
on the U.S. Scientific, Technical and Engineering Workforce Report**

Today we are releasing a new report from the National Science and Technology Council entitled Ensuring a Strong U.S. Scientific, Technical, and Engineering Workforce in the 21st Century. It reaches two fundamental conclusions about our science, technology, and engineering workforce:

- First, these workers are essential to both the private and public sectors. In the private sector, they help propel the economy and provide valuable services. In the public sector, scientific, technical and engineering workers support important Federal missions.
- Second, it is in the national interest to vigorously pursue the development of domestic science, technology, and engineering workers from all ethnic and gender groups.

Science, technology, and engineering jobs present great opportunities for American workers. They are among the fastest growing in the U.S. workforce. Unemployment in science and engineering occupations – with some variability among fields – is quite low. However, the increasing economic role of science, technology, and engineering has increased demand for all types of scientific, technical and engineering workers, from technicians to Ph.D. research scientists and engineers; and we have some serious issues to address in that regard.

If current trends persist, our nation may begin to fall far short of the talent needed to spur the innovation process that has given America such a strong economy and high quality of life. The ongoing debate over H-1B visas suggests that worker shortages are limiting our economic growth. America is indeed fortunate that talented men and women from all over the world have chosen to study and work in the United States. Our leadership in science and technology is largely due to this situation. But we cannot expect it to continue. We will have to do a much better job of growing our own talent, which we should do for a number of reasons.

Demographic trends also raise concerns about the nation's ability to meet its future high-tech workforce needs. Historically, non-Hispanic white males have made up a large fraction of U.S. scientists and engineers. But in the 21st century this fraction of the U.S. population is projected to decrease significantly. Other U.S. population groups, such as

Hispanics and African-Americans, form a much smaller part of the high-tech workforce, but their populations as a fraction of the U.S. population are expected to increase markedly in the next 50 years. This implies that science, technology, and engineering workers may decline as a fraction of the total workforce if the relative participation of these respective groups remains unchanged. If we want a strong high-tech workforce, members of all groups, including non-Hispanic white males, must participate at increasing rates. High-tech careers will have to become more attractive to everyone in our society – women and men from all backgrounds and all parts of the country.

Our human resources policies must move beyond simply the supply and demand of personnel and address the composition of our workforce. If we are to maintain leadership across the frontiers of science, we must draw upon our full talent pool to ensure that our scientific and technical workplace reflects the face of America.

A copy of the report, U.S. Scientific, Technical and Engineering Workforce, is available at </html/workforcercpt.pdf> (pdf version) and </html/workforcercpt.html> (html version).

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