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How Should Technological Advances Affect the Role of Government?

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By: Ed Ring

**“Robots will steal your job, but that’s ok.”**

**-Federico Pistono**

Anyone who has recently driven through Mountain View, in the heart of Silicon Valley, is likely to have had the memorable experience of sharing the road with a car that has nobody inside. Google’s “autonomous cars” are being tested there, and apparently they drive better than people do – they are smart, safe, sober, and tireless. They have the potential to eliminate 3.6 million full-time jobs in the United States.

Anyone purchasing materials at a Home Depot store, or their local grocery chain store, without interacting with a human cashier, has seen the future of retail employment. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are 3.4 million people working as retail cashiers in the United States. Most of those jobs are also at risk.

What about agriculture? New robots are coming that can do anything a farm worker can do. As noted in this report, “Robot harvests on the horizon; farm owners predict machines will revolutionize costs,” a machine is now being tested that can thin lettuce shoots, a job that requires extraordinary precision and finesse. If machines can thin lettuce, they can do anything on the farm.

Manufacturing? Old news. Robots are on track to completely take over manufacturing. What about journalism? Can robots displace reporters? Read your local newspaper’s high school sports reports – but don’t be too sure a human composed the story, because many newspaper chains have already automated routine reporting. They crowd-source the data gathering with mobile phone applications, and let software applications produce more consistent, more comprehensive written coverage. By the way, how much would you like to bet on whether or not a robot can cook a better Big Mac?

Enough already. If you don’t think technology and automation in this era represents a fundamentally new phenomenon compared to the pace and impact of technological advances in previous centuries, I’ve got a bridge to sell you. Jobs are being relentlessly eliminated via automation. This is throwing highly skilled workers alongside semi-skilled and unskilled workers into a labor market where most of them will not find a new job that comes anywhere close to paying them what they used to earn in the job they lost.

1. Do you agree with the above articles point of view of technology in the U.S. today? Explain.
2. Have you, or someone you know, been affected negatively in regards to technology?
3. Can you think of any examples not listed above, where technology has impacted society in a positive way?
4. Technological advances are also happening within our levels of government. Can you think of a few positive outcomes and negative outcomes due to technology in our government system? (Ex. Military, Security, Personal Privacy)
5. Same concept to this question as the last, but in regards to international affairs? How is it impacting the way nations communicate?