

Bill would include service sector in offering job insurance

BY ADAM SMITH

The United States has long been the world leader in leveraging innovation and technology to strengthen and grow our economy.

Our competitiveness in the global market relies not only on the advancement of technology but also on the strength of our workforce. We need policies that help maintain our technological leadership, stimulate job growth within the U.S. and provide lifelong learning and job training opportunities.

To address the need for an updated job training system, I recently joined 75 House colleagues in co-sponsoring the Trade Adjustment Assistance Improvement Act. The legislation would strengthen and expand TAA to help those affected by new economic realities and take the common-sense step of including service sector workers in the current program.

The U.S. manufacturing sector has been hit hard with unemployment. In recent years, the service sector has experienced similar declines in employment as a result of the increasingly global and competitive marketplace.

The need for this legislation is real. Despite devoting tremendous resources to

lowering tariffs and promoting economic engagement with other nations through trade agreements, the Bush administration has failed to put into place domestic policies to assist hard-working Americans in transitioning to the global marketplace and adjusting to the changes in the U.S. economy.



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Currently, TAA provides income support, job training and searching, relocation assistance and health care tax credits to workers who have lost their jobs due to trade. However, this program was created in 1962 and fails to address the challenges of today's global environment.

Millions of Americans who have lost manufacturing jobs in recent years can access government assistance through TAA benefits. However, the service sector, including software developers, engineers and customer call center workers, are not covered by TAA and get no similar benefits. This is especially troubling given that some estimates suggest millions of service jobs could be lost by 2015.

The proposed legislation would benefit displaced service workers as well as entire

industries affected by international trade that are protected under U.S. laws.

The legislation also amends eligibility requirements for TAA to cover those who lose jobs due to overseas production to any country, not just those countries with whom the U.S. has trade agreements.

The bill simplifies the application process for wage insurance. In addition, the legislation strengthens the data collection and reporting requirements by making it mandatory for the Department of Labor to track and make public data on both service sector and manufacturing job trends and TAA usage.

Finally, it dramatically increases the funding available for job training programs and enhances health care subsidies for displaced workers.

This legislation is critical to responding to the challenges faced by many hard-working Americans and promoting the competitiveness of the American workforce. It is, however, only a partial response. This legislative initiative must be coupled with a broader strategy aimed at implementing responsible economic policies and investing in human capital to promote learning and skill-development for workers throughout their lives.

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Employees laid off when the Tacoma Amazon.com call center closed in March were ineligible for benefits available to workers in other industries.
The News Tribune

Such a strategy includes building a strong framework of rules for international trade; opening substantial new markets for American goods and services in order to level the playing field for American workers in all sectors of the economy; and improving the quality and availability of educational opportunities – both K-12 and higher education – so our workers can fully participate in the global economy.

Our nation's prosperity and economic

growth is dependent on our workers' ability to continually upgrade their skills. In the face of ever greater competition, we need to ensure that American workers remain the best and most highly skilled workforce in the world.

The TAA Improvement Act is an important component of our commitment to workers.

U.S. Rep. Adam Smith (D-Tacoma) represents the Ninth Congressional District.