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Contact: Ken Scudder, 202-295-7664

Ken_Scudder@jec.senate.gov

<http://jec.senate.gov>

JEC HEARING OFFERS ANALYSIS, PROPOSALS FOR DEALING WITH ROBOTS AND AUTOMATION IN THE WORKPLACE

WASHINGTON – At today’s hearing of the U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee (JEC), “[The Transformative Impact of Robots and Automation](#),” [Ranking Democrat Carolyn B. Maloney](#) (D-NY) and three witnesses outlined the benefits and potential pitfalls of expanded automation and robotics in the workforce.

In her opening statement, Rep. Maloney said, “Throughout history, concerns have been voiced that new technologies would make human labor obsolete. It hasn’t happened. While there have been dramatic shifts in how people have earned their livings, the quantity of jobs has increased and the quality has improved.”

“We know that automation can boost productivity, lift aggregate demand, reduce consumer prices and improve our quality of life,” she added. “While all of these benefits are apparent in the long run, we also know that in the short run innovation can displace workers, causing severe economic pain to workers whose jobs are automated out of existence or whose wages are reduced dramatically.”

“Automation is a difficult thing to predict,” she continued. “We don’t know what’s going to happen. And we just don’t know how fast it’s going to happen or in which industries or what will be the exact consequences.” Rep. Maloney’s opening statement can be seen in full [here](#).

While the witnesses were mostly optimistic about the effects that automation and robots have, and will have on the workplace there were concerns about how best to prepare for this new environment.

Dr. Andrew McAfee, Principal Research Scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said in his opening statement, “I just keep humming the Old McDonald theme song to myself, because **E-I-E-I-O** tells me a great deal about where we need to make some changes. And for me that means **Education**, it means **Immigration Reform**, it means facilitating and encouraging more **Entrepreneurship**, it means doubling down on our **Infrastructure** which is in fairly unhealthy shape and then finally the O for me is **Original Research**.” His opening statement can be seen in full [here](#).

Dr. Harry Holzer, Professor at the McCourt School of Public Policy at Georgetown University, cautioned in his opening statement, “Future automation should not be an excuse to avoid or eliminate a sensible, moderate set of worker supports and services to address the labor market problems that we’ve already seen... We need solutions on several fronts – the most important being the skill bias of technology. There’s a range of changes we need to make in our skill-producing institutions [...]. I believe we need to support high road employers who invest in the skills and high performance and high compensation of their workers. [...] If the labor market becomes more unstable, we do need to make sure that universal benefits are available and portable – health care, paid family leave, etc.” His opening statement can be seen in full [here](#).

The hearing can be viewed in its entirety [here](#).

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