



Robots, Automation and A.I., Oh My – California Proposes to Establish “Commission on the Future of Work”

Insights

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The “future of work” is the topic *du jour* these days for pundits, academics, policy makers, employers and unions alike. Numerous conferences, white papers, academic studies, and media investigations have all explored this subject in recent years – the U.S. Department of Labor even held a symposium in 2016 on “the future of work.” Whether these concerns - what all of this technological advancement means for employment - are hype or reality remains to be seen. It appears certain that rapid technological advancements are transforming the workplace and the economy in innumerable ways. The “gig economy” has demonstrated that in dramatic fashion. What remains less clear is what the long-term implications of all of this change will mean. Will we all be replaced by robots and artificial intelligence? Or will the economy and the nature of work adjust to reflect new and different opportunities in the future?

One California lawmaker thinks this issue is of such critical importance that the state should establish a permanent and formal commission to take a look at the matter.

Senate Bill 1470 by Senator Henry Stern (D-Canoga Park) would establish in state government the Commission on the Future of Work, comprised of 8 appointed members with knowledge and expertise in workforce development, labor, technology, robotics or artificial intelligence.

The legislative findings and declarations contained in SB 1470 justify the need for the bill as follows:

“California is committed to developing a plan to become the most competitive, durable, equitable and sustainable economy in the world, where technology innovation shall strengthen, not erode, the middle class.

Technology, when put to work for the benefit of human society, has fueled progress throughout history, unlocking the growth of high-quality goods and services coupled with overall price reductions, dramatic reductions in poverty, disease, and famine, as well as leaps in science and the arts.

Exponential growth in technology innovation, including automation and artificial intelligence, as well as broader economic trends of wage stagnation, declining workforce participation, rising income inequality, and growth in part-time, lower-wage jobs, compel California to update its planning

around education, employment, and the economy as a whole to better understand, anticipate, and shape the future of work in the short and long term.

The Commission on the Future of Work is necessary to prepare California residents for the future of work and to ensure advancements in technology serve the construction of a durable middle class and sustainable economy.

The commission would be charged with convening a public process to gather input and understand the issues, and would be authorized to commission further research to examine the impact of technology on workers, employers and the economy. The commission would also be responsible for advising the Governor and the Legislature and making public policy recommendations to “manage the development, deployment, regulation, taxation, and fair distribution of the benefits of technology used in the workplace that advances the interests of workers and the public.” However, these would be advisory recommendations only and further legislation would be needed to implement any changes to the law.

The language establishing the “Commission on the Future of Work” was amended into SB 1470 on June 18, 2018, and the bill will soon be heard in the Assembly Labor Committee.

No word yet on whether one of the commission spots would be reserved for a robot.

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