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Start with education to tackle the job drain

President Bush's recent assertion that he is a "war" president is correct. However, he is wrong if he thinks Iraq is the war that concerns most Americans.

A CNN poll reports that Americans are more concerned about the economy and health care than Iraq. The war that Bush should be fighting — the one that ultimately threatens our security and lifestyle — is the global economic war, referred to herein as the Glonomic war.

America has been fighting the Glonomic war during Bush's tenure, as well as during most of the prior administration. The rules of engagement are simple: Whoever delivers a quality product or service for the cheapest price wins.

Oil is not the key resource here, as with that other war. The Glonomic war is mind-driven. We now live in a world that grants almost equal access to most resources.

Communal resources include Chinese factories, Brazilian wood, Indian services, Italian designers, etc. Competitive advantage is now achieved by applying intellectual capital to the communal resources. In other words, companies that can add the most mindfulness to a product or service can be globally competitive, whereas, companies that add little or no intellectual capital to their offerings are typically crying for protection. This same idea applies to workers in an economy.

Can the United States add jobs during the Glonomic war? Yes. Will the United States add many living-wage jobs, that is, jobs paying more than \$15 per hour? Not likely.

Here's the problem: Nearly all standardized jobs are up for grabs in the global economy. A standardized job is like a baking recipe: An ascertainable amount input (labor hours) causes a certain output (product or service). Like a good recipe, standardized jobs can be replicated just about anywhere. We first witnessed this standardization phenomenon with blue-collar factory jobs. These jobs were low-hanging

fruit because industry had standardized the work to support computer systems and to promote a generally more efficient way of organizing the workload.

Due to their apparent lack of education and pro-union mentalities, it was easy for some to believe that the blue-collar workers got what was coming to them. Then white-collar outsourcing began. Could it be that the same tendency toward efficiency and standardization will threaten the white-collar workers? I have no doubt.

White-collar fields dominated by standardized labor content include engineering, architecture, accounting, technical support, technical research, backroom operations, hardware and software design.

Where does all this standardization leave America? We're becoming a design, distribute and service economy. Americans still have the best idea of what sells in America, so designing products and services typically remains in American hands. The designs are converted elsewhere and sent to this market, where American labor distributes and services the goods. The furniture, textile and research industries are examples. It's still uncertain how Americans with no jobs will pay for these goods and services.

How do we win this economic war? Perhaps we need a new standard for education. Instead of challenging our eighth-graders with a sixth-grade test, let's raise the bar.

Let's provoke our kids to develop world views, to architect and apply intellectual tools and to learn several foreign languages.

Winning the Glonomic war will be difficult and costly. Of course, a good first step toward winning is for the president to realize what war this country is really fighting.

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**POINT
OF VIEW**

**Rob
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