

GUEST EDITORIAL

by Richard M. Nixon

THE NATIONAL JOB BANK

Today, many of our people are enveloped in a vicious cycle of poverty. Because they do not have a good education, they cannot get a good job. Because they cannot get a good job, they cannot afford decent housing. Because they live in slum housing, they find it difficult to establish a sound and stable home for their children. And their children go to inferior schools, which insures the perpetuation and expansion of the cycle.

The cycle must be broken at every point—jobs, education, and housing.

In the long run quality education is the most important factor in my view. But even if we were to transform our educational system overnight, the result of the miracle would not be felt for years—for education, by its very nature, is a time-consuming process that proceeds and builds in logical steps. Moreover, for two-thirds of the poor, days of basic education have passed, and their future must not be coldly sacrificed on the altar of future generations.

Decent housing is vital; but housing alone can never resolve the basic conditions of ignorance, joblessness and despair. And we delude ourselves if we think that we can reverse cause and effect. Decent housing—and furniture and clothing and food and entertainment—are the products of a good education and good jobs, not the reverse.

What is needed now, and what can be provided now, is the dignity and satisfaction of working for a living and earning the money that will give a person the economic power to buy the things that make for a decent home and a good life.

What can we do to make it possible for more people to hold productive jobs?

We know that there are three requirements for a man to be productively employed. First, he must be qualified for the job; second, the job must be available; but third, he must know about the job. Thus far, we have concentrated on the first two conditions, which is certainly not wrong, but we have failed to place adequate emphasis upon the third. It is in this area I believe that rapid progress can be made, and it is to this area that this modest proposal addresses itself.

In our concern to create job opportunities and to train people, we have largely ignored the problem of communication about jobs. Today, tens of thousands of jobs are going begging because people qualified for those jobs are not aware of them. The information gap in job hunting has become a chasm and we can do something to close it.

I propose that we use existing computer technology to match the unemployed with available jobs—to match the qualifications of a job-seeker anywhere in the country with a job opening anywhere in the country.

Such computer job-matching systems have been used for years in industry to match professional workers to professional job opportunities. Harvard students have had a good measure of success in matching male and female on both a temporary and permanent basis through the use of computers. There seems to me to be no real barrier to using computers to match those seeking entry level jobs to the jobs available.

How would it work? One approach would be to establish a major computer center in this country with scores of branches in the depressed sections of our cities. The branch offices would be easily accessible to anyone who wanted to work.

A person could walk in off the street and give all the essential facts to a computer operator—what kind of training he had, what kind of educational background he had, in what area he wanted to work, whether he could move to a new area, what kind of income he needed, how many hours he could work. This information would then be fed into the computer which would have been previously stockpiled with the job opportunities in private industry and business, in non-profit organizations and in government.

The computer could then provide the applicant with a print-out of the opportunities available in the community, the city, the state and even the nation. The purpose would thus be to expand his range of job options, to expand his freedom of choice.

The computer could also be programmed with the training opportunities available anywhere in the country from government and business and industry.

As our experience with computer job-matching grew, I can envisage a time when we could program the computer to provide people with information about the available services of which they are now unaware. These supportive services would include legal aid, medical aid, economic help and training and social and spiritual counseling.

The program is feasible. The National Association of Manufacturers has developed a demonstration model and is now working on a pilot project in North Carolina which is expected to be operative on a state-wide basis by the end of the year. Building on what has been done, the time has now come to implement such a system on a nation-wide basis—to put computer technology to work resolving a part of the complex crisis that faces us today.