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Guest column: America’s AI boom has a blue-collar challenge

**Author:**

Rob Portman

**Publication:**

Macomb Daily

**Publication Date:**

09/06/2026

**URL:**

https://www.macombdaily.com/2026/09/06/guest-column-americas-ai-boom-has-a-blue-collar-challenge/

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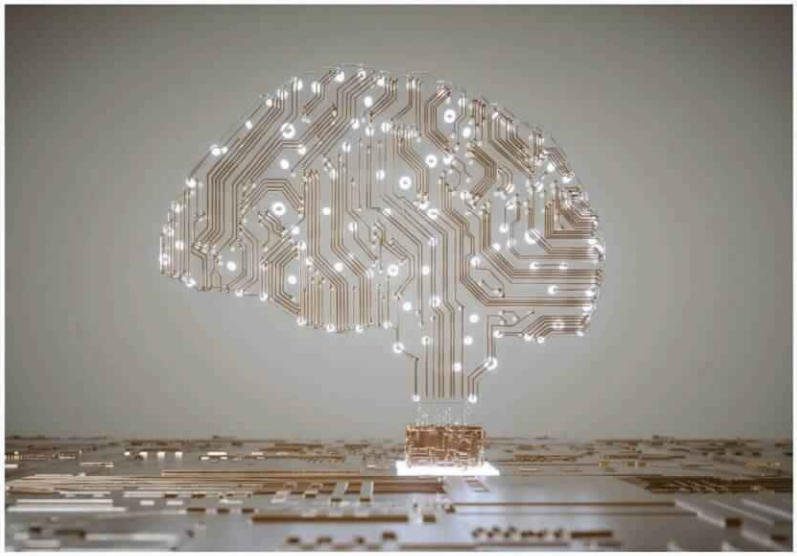
# Guest column: America's AI boom has a blue-collar challenge



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By GUEST COLUMN
PUBLISHED: September 6, 2026 at 8:40 AM EDT | UPDATED: September 6, 2026 at 8:57 AM EDT

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By Sen. Rob Portman

Guest columnist

America's artificial intelligence future may depend as much on electricians, welders, and construction workers as it does on software engineers.

Technology companies are investing at a remarkable pace in the infrastructure needed to power AI. Microsoft, Meta, Amazon, and Alphabet are expected to spend about $700 billion just this year. That figure doesn't include the additional investments required for semiconductor manufacturing and electric grid renovation.

But there's a major obstacle: America doesn't have enough skilled workers to build everything the AI economy will require.

By 2030, the United States could need an additional 140,000 more skilled tradespeople — welders, HVAC technicians, construction workers, electricians, and others — to meet AI infrastructure demand. Finding and training them should be a national priority.

During a recent trip to Switzerland, I was briefed on the latest data from the nearly century-old Swiss apprenticeship model. This skills-based program has helped support one of the most innovative economies in the world by providing clear, respected pathways into

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technical careers.

Through Switzerland's Vocational Education and Training system, students can begin apprenticeships as early as age 15, combining classroom instruction with practical experience at participating companies. Today, roughly 70% of Swiss young people participate in apprenticeships spanning construction, pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, healthcare, banking, and other industries.

Importantly, choosing an apprenticeship doesn't close the door to higher education. Graduates can enter their chosen profession or continue their studies and pursue a university degree. The system therefore gives students multiple routes to successful careers rather than treating vocational and academic education as competing tracks.

Employers benefit, too. Companies see an estimated 7% to 10% return on their investment in apprenticeship programs, and many apprentices ultimately remain with the companies that trained them. Businesses gain a reliable way to develop talent while workers receive skills tied directly to available jobs. Programs can also evolve alongside technology and industry, rather than training workers for jobs that may no longer exist.

That approach is particularly relevant as America builds the physical foundation of the AI economy.

Demand for skilled trades is poised to increase dramatically. Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang has estimated "six-figure salaries for people who are building chip factories or computer factories or AI factories." Meanwhile, more young Americans are showing interest in vocational education as they face uncertainty about some white-collar careers and rising higher-education costs.

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Employers should seize that opportunity by investing not only in wages, but also in apprenticeship pipelines.

Some states have already started. Colorado's CareerWise program, partially inspired by the Swiss model, combines classroom education with paid apprenticeships in fields such as information technology and advanced manufacturing. Similar efforts are emerging elsewhere as employers look for sustainable ways to develop skilled workers.

Those programs should become the beginning of a broader movement.

America's AI leadership won't be secured by algorithms and computing power alone. It will also require people who can build chip plants, install electrical systems, wire data centers, and maintain the infrastructure beneath the digital economy.

Switzerland has spent generations building that kind of workforce. As America confronts its own AI infrastructure challenge, we should learn from its example.

Former U.S. Senator Rob Portman (R-OH) represented Ohio in the U.S. Senate from 2011 to 2023.

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OP-ED: America’s AI boom has a blue-collar challenge

**Author:**

Rob Portman

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Van Nuys News Press

**Publication Date:**

09/09/2026

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## OP-ED: America's AI Boom Has a Blue-Collar Challenge

By George Christopher Thomas
SEP 9, 2026 #BlueCollar #Rob Portman #Senate


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*By Sen. Rob Portman, Special to the Van Nuys News Press* Download Interactive Maps

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AI Infrastructure Boom Could Require 140,000 More Skilled Tradespeople by 2030

**Author:**

Rob Portman

**Publication:**

Omega Technology Solutions Group, Inc.

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09/06/2026

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POLICY

# AI Infrastructure Boom Could Require 140,000 More Skilled Tradespeople by 2030

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Former Senator Rob Portman argues America's AI leadership depends on electricians, welders, and construction workers—not just engineers—and calls for Swiss-style apprenticeship programs.

Omega Editorial · September 6, 2026 · 3 min read

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Tech giants are expected to invest $700 billion in AI infrastructure in 2026, not including semiconductor manufacturing and grid upgrades.
- The U.S. could need 140,000 additional skilled tradespeople—electricians, welders, HVAC technicians, construction workers—by 2030 to support AI infrastructure.
- Switzerland's apprenticeship model, where 70% of young people participate in vocational training, offers a potential blueprint for U.S. workforce development.
- Nvidia's CEO projects six-figure salaries for workers building chip and AI factories as demand for skilled trades accelerates.
- Colorado's CareerWise program and similar state initiatives are combining classroom education with paid apprenticeships in technical fields.

## The skilled labor gap behind AI's physical infrastructure

America's artificial intelligence ambitions face an unexpected bottleneck: a shortage of electricians, welders, HVAC technicians, and construction workers needed to build the physical infrastructure powering the AI economy.

Microsoft, Meta, Amazon, and Alphabet are projected to invest approximately $700 billion in AI infrastructure in 2026 alone, according to former U.S. Senator Rob Portman, writing in a guest column. That figure excludes additional investments required for semiconductor manufacturing facilities and electric grid upgrades.

By 2030, the United States could need an additional 140,000 skilled tradespeople to meet AI infrastructure demand, Portman estimates. He argues that finding and training this workforce should become a national priority.

## Why it matters

The AI infrastructure buildout represents one of the largest capital investment cycles in modern history, but its success hinges on blue-collar labor availability as much as technological innovation. Without sufficient skilled workers, data center construction, chip fabrication facilities, and grid modernization projects could face delays that slow America's competitive position in AI development.

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## Learning from Switzerland's century-old model

Portman points to Switzerland's Vocational Education and Training system as a potential blueprint. The program, nearly a century old, allows students to begin apprenticeships as early as age 15, combining classroom instruction with hands-on experience at participating companies.

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Roughly 70 percent of Swiss young people participate in apprenticeships spanning construction, pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, healthcare, banking, and other industries. Critically, the system doesn't force students to choose between vocational training and higher education—graduates can enter their profession immediately or continue to university.

Employers see an estimated 7 to 10 percent return on investment in apprenticeship programs, and many apprentices remain with the companies that trained them. The model creates a reliable talent pipeline while ensuring workers gain skills tied directly to available jobs.

## Six-figure salaries for trades workers

Demand for skilled trades is accelerating. Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang has projected "six-figure salaries for people who are building chip factories or computer factories or AI factories," according to Portman.

Meanwhile, more young Americans are expressing interest in vocational education amid uncertainty about white-collar career prospects and rising higher education costs.

## Early U.S. efforts show promise

Some states have launched programs inspired by the Swiss approach. Colorado's CareerWise program combines classroom education with paid apprenticeships in fields including information technology and advanced manufacturing. Similar initiatives are emerging elsewhere as employers seek sustainable workforce development strategies.

Portman argues these programs should mark the beginning of a broader national movement. "America's AI leadership won't be secured by algorithms and computing power alone," he writes. "It will also require people who can build chip plants, install electrical systems, wire data centers, and maintain the infrastructure beneath the digital economy."

The column was originally published in the Macomb Daily and distributed by Keybridge Communications on behalf of the Faith Whittlesey Society. Portman represented Ohio in the U.S. Senate from 2011 to 2023.

#ai infrastructure #skilled trades #workforce development #apprenticeships #data centers #semiconductor manufacturing

This is an original analysis by the Omega editorial team. Source reporting: AI Watch.

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### Liability for AI Chatbot-Linked Crimes

New legislation would make companies legally responsible when their AI systems participate in criminal activity, following high-profile campus shootings.

Via AI Watch · Sep 8, 2026

### Protect Sensitive Data

Municipal employees face new documentation requirements as generative AI tools become embedded in everyday software.

Via AI Watch · Sep 8, 2026

### penalties for AI chatbot crime links

James Uthmeier proposes legislation after ChatGPT interactions preceded two campus shooting incidents in the state.

Via AI Watch · Sep 8, 2026

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Rob Portman

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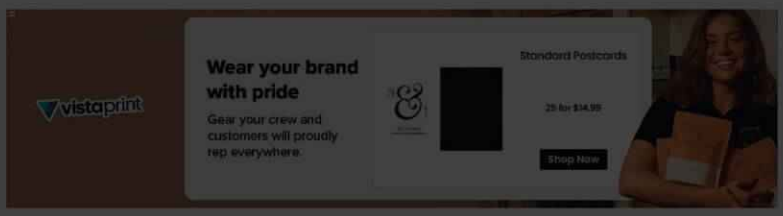


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# Guest column: America's AI boom has a blue-collar challenge

Photo courtesy of Metro Editorial Services


By GUEST COLUMN
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By Sen. Rob Portman

Guest columnist

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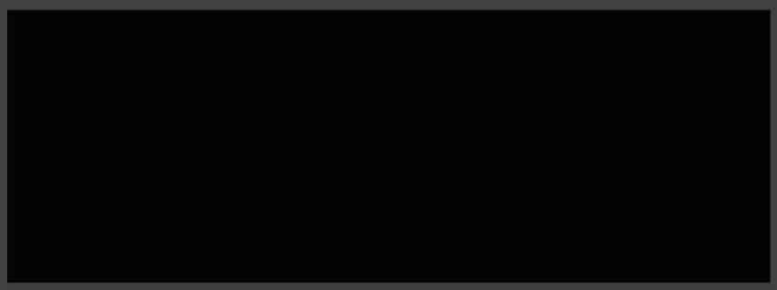


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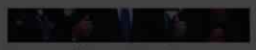

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**Author:**

Rob Portman

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ROB PORTMAN Guest Columnist Sep 9, 2026 0

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Rob Portman

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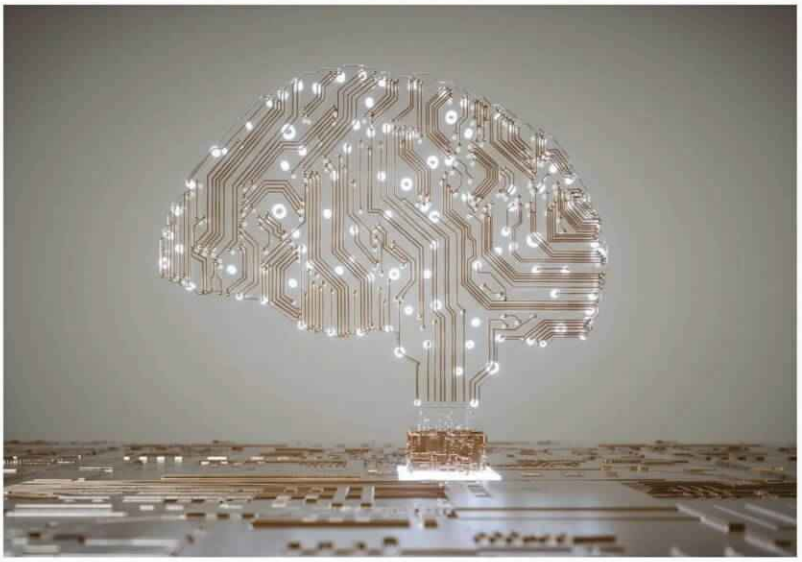

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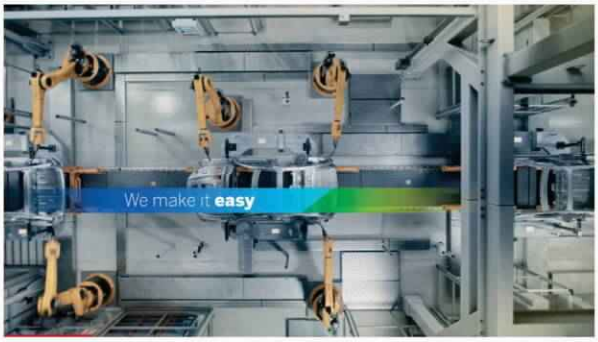


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By 2030, the United States could need an additional 140,000 more skilled tradespeople — welders, HVAC technicians, construction workers, electricians, and others — to meet AI infrastructure demand. Finding and training them should be a national priority.

During a recent trip to Switzerland, I was briefed on the latest data from the nearly century-old Swiss apprenticeship model. This skills-based program has helped support *one of the*

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2. Michigan won the game on a Hail Mary and got dropped out of the AP Top 25 anyway. Why?
3. Detroit Lions still do not trust Christian Mahogany
4. When deciding where to volunteer, honored couple suggests taking your time
5. Large, fast-burning wildfires are making it hard for Colorado forests to recover
6. EPA proposal could leave the public in the dark on data center plans
7. 'Markedly better': Michigan bullish on Bryce Underwood after camp surge
8. Regain control with the best bladder control supplements
9. Detroit Lions 2026 practice squad

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technical careers.

Through Switzerland's Vocational Education and Training system, students can begin apprenticeships as early as age 15, combining classroom instruction with practical experience at participating companies. Today, roughly 70% of Swiss young people participate in apprenticeships spanning construction, pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, healthcare, banking, and other industries.

Importantly, choosing an apprenticeship doesn't close the door to higher education. Graduates can enter their chosen profession or continue their studies and pursue a university degree. The system therefore gives students multiple routes to successful careers rather than treating vocational and academic education as competing tracks.

Employers benefit, too. Companies see an estimated 7% to 10% return on their investment in apprenticeship programs, and many apprentices ultimately remain with the companies that trained them. Businesses gain a reliable way to develop talent while workers receive skills tied directly to available jobs. Programs can also evolve alongside technology and industry, rather than training workers for jobs that may no longer exist.

That approach is particularly relevant as America builds the physical foundation of the AI economy.

Demand for skilled trades is poised to increase dramatically. Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang has estimated "six-figure salaries for people who are building chip factories or computer factories or AI factories." Meanwhile, more young Americans are showing interest in vocational education as they face uncertainty about some white-collar careers and rising higher-education costs.

9 Detroit Lions 2026 practice squad revealed

10 Oklahoma man charged with murder after 2 killed in explosion at marijuana extraction facility


Employers should seize that opportunity by investing not only in wages, but also in apprenticeship pipelines.

Some states have already started. Colorado's CareerWise program, partially inspired by the Swiss model, combines classroom education with paid apprenticeships in fields such as information technology and advanced manufacturing. Similar efforts are emerging elsewhere as employers look for sustainable ways to develop skilled workers.

Those programs should become the beginning of a broader movement.

America's AI leadership won't be secured by algorithms and computing power alone. It will also require people who can build chip plants, install electrical systems, wire data centers, and maintain the infrastructure beneath the digital economy.

Switzerland has spent generations building that kind of workforce. As America confronts its own AI infrastructure challenge, we should learn from its example.

Former U.S. Senator Rob Portman (R-OH) represented Ohio in the U.S. Senate from 2011 to 2023.

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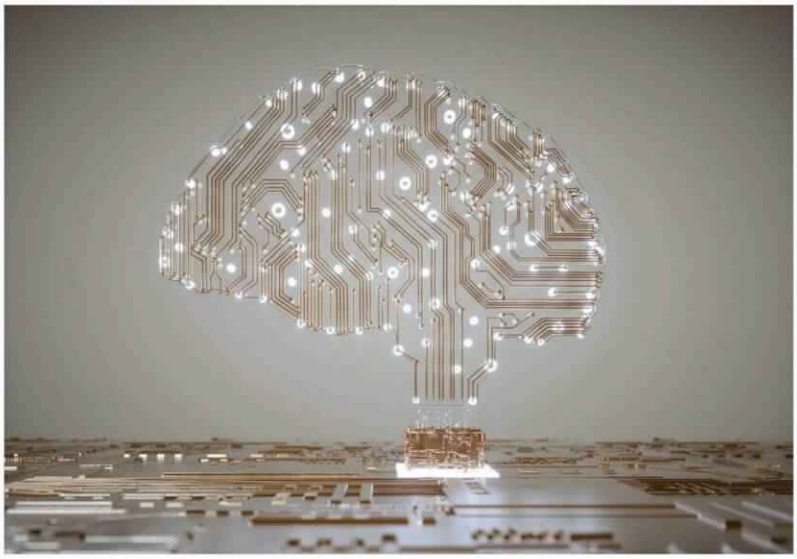
SPORTS › OLYMPICS

# Guest column: America's AI boom has a blue-collar challenge



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By GUEST COLUMN
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By Sen. Rob Portman

Guest columnist

America's artificial intelligence future may depend as much on electricians, welders, and construction workers as it does on software engineers.

Technology companies are investing at a remarkable pace in the infrastructure needed to power AI. Microsoft, Meta, Amazon, and Alphabet are expected to spend about $700 billion just this year. That figure doesn't include the additional investments required for semiconductor manufacturing and electric grid renovation.


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But there's a major obstacle: America doesn't have enough skilled workers to build everything the AI economy will require.

By 2030, the United States could need an additional 140,000 more skilled tradespeople — welders, HVAC technicians, construction workers, electricians, and others — to meet AI infrastructure demand. Finding and training them should be a national priority.

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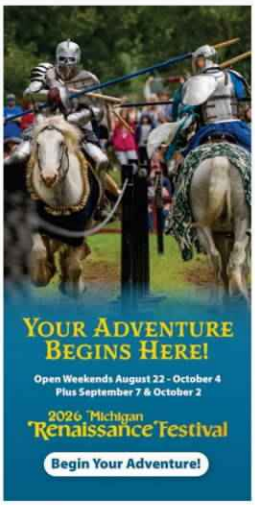


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2. Large, fast-burning wildfires are making it hard for Colorado forests to recover
3. Column: 25 Years Later, 9/11 still fresh in most minds
4. Column: Gloria Steinem's death hit home in a personal way
5. Baltimore could record its lowest homicide rate in nearly 50 years
6. EPA proposal could leave the public in the dark on data center plans
7. Column: Labor movement in alive in America
8. Michigan AG investigating alleged embezzlement of state grant from the American Arab Chamber
9. Students and teachers brace for Michigan's new classroom phone ban
10. A judge blocks Trump's new bid to

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10 curb birthright citizenship, citing Supreme Court precedent

Cardiologist Warns Americans: "Pour Out the Bottled Water"

Gundry MD

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