

A Positive Outlook

Two Groups



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I am generally of the belief that there are two groups of people in the world: those who are building robots and those who are being replaced by them. Autonomy, artificial intelligence (AI), and what is commonly referred to as the Internet of Things (IoT) are changing the way we live and the way we do business.

Nevada has done a remarkable job of embracing new technologies and opening new markets. In 2013, Nevada was named by the Federal Aviation Administration as one of six locations authorized to test unmanned aerial vehicles. Shortly thereafter, the state created the Nevada Institute for Autonomous Systems, which is currently teaming with dozens of companies that are actively developing technologies ranging from infrastructure inspection and package delivery to advanced military command and control systems.

In 2017, the Nevada Legislature passed Assembly Bill 69 (AB69), allowing the testing and operation of autonomous vehicles on Nevada roads. Arguably among the most progressive legislation of its kind in the nation, AB69 enables self-driving cars—after guaranteeing certain safety requirements—to operate commercially in Nevada without a human driver in the vehicle. Later this summer, regulations will be adopted pursuant to AB69 that will make Nevada first in the world to establish a formal regulatory regime for the use of self-driving cars to transport persons and property. Moreover, AB69 authorizes the use of driver-assisted platooning technology. To be clear, platooning technology enables two or more trucks to travel on highways at electronically coordinated speeds, following at distances that would be unreasonable without technological assistance, thus significantly increasing operating efficiency.

The only thing more impressive than the magnitude of these changes is the speed at which they are being developed and deployed. Perhaps our greatest achievement is providing the regulatory certainty companies need to reduce the time between innovation and commercialization.

About six months ago, I taught my daughter to drive; I doubt she will ever do the same for her child. Uber drivers may be among the shortest-lived occupations in U.S. history. Within five years, autonomous semitrucks will have the ability to move goods across the country without needing to stop for rest, to eat or for a bathroom break, significantly reducing the costs of goods movement. Within a single generation, people will not own cars, but will share and schedule them. I wonder what people are going to do with all those garages. I wonder how insurance companies and trial lawyers will adapt when there are few, if any, accidents attributable to driver negligence. I wonder how many fewer miles of roads and highways we will need because we are able to use the ones we already have with near perfect efficiency.

There are those who are fearful of these changes because they will displace employees and make some businesses functionally obsolete. These are legitimate concerns, and the rapid transformation of our economy will require that policymakers give increased attention to help working families adapt. What we must not do is slow, inhibit or create any artificial barriers to the development, testing and deployment of new technologies. We also must remember the potential that many of these technologies have to increase our productivity and, most importantly, save thousands of lives. Ninety four percent of motor vehicle fatalities—more than 30,000 deaths last year alone—were caused by human error. News reports will inevitably focus on tragedies that occur when self-driving technology fails, is improperly used or cannot prevent an accident, but few reports will be made about the thousands of times the technology saves a life. Nevada's willingness to be an early adopter is already paying dividends, and the long-term upside more than outweighs any short-run challenges.

I have no idea what the next big thing will be, but I know I want it in Nevada. To do this, we are going to have to maintain our position as being pro-business and pro-resident and get very comfortable, very quickly, with being pro-robot.