

## Job Growth Projections – Fact and Fiction

The Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) recently-released projected job growth figures for 2002-2012 have been spun furiously by defenders of offshoring and other symptoms of corporate-led globalization. Their aim is to use the projections about what jobs will grow fastest in the future to assuage broad public anxiety about the offshoring of U.S. jobs. The piece by Bruce Bartlett, published in the *Washington Times* on March 1, 2004, is typical of the public relations campaign to squeeze calming news out of the projections. While Bartlett's piece, "Upbeat Outlook for Upscale Jobs," makes many optimistic claims regarding the nature of future U.S. job growth, a closer examination of BLS wages and employment data exposes the numerous fictions of Bartlett's sadly misplaced optimism:

***OFFSHORING DEFENDER'S FICTION:*** "... the good news is that most of the fastest rising occupations are well-paying jobs."

***FACT:*** Six out of the ten occupational categories that are expected to grow the fastest over the next decade are low-wage jobs.

A closer look at most of the other jobs that Bartlett lists in his celebration of the high wages of the "fastest rising" occupations only underscores the dismal pay and prospects that will continue to plague a growing number of U.S. workers over the next decade. While only three computer-related occupations remain on BLS's list of the 10 fastest growing jobs, six of the ten are low-wage positions (see "BLS Releases 2002-2012 Employment Projections," BLS News Release, Feb. 11, 2004, at Table 3c). Bartlett even lists many of these occupations immediately after making his erroneous assertion that most of these jobs are well-paid. He specifically mentions medical assistants (mean wage of \$24,810 in 2002), home health aides (\$19,050), physical therapist aides (\$22,120) and medical records and health information technicians (\$25,980). These wages all fall considerably short of the national mean of \$35,000 in 2002 (from the BLS survey, *Occupational Employment and Wages, 2002*).

Among the four better-paid positions on the ten fastest growing occupations list, the number of positions in "network systems and data communications analysts" is expected to increase 57 percent between 2002 and 2012. This sounds impressive - until the absolute numbers are taken into account. Of the 21.3 million jobs that BLS calculates will be added to the national workforce by 2012, only 106,000 of these opportunities are expected to be for network systems and data communications analysts.

BLS data also show that alongside these small gains in certain well-paid jobs, the biggest slowdowns in job growth are concentrated in the information, financial services and professional business services sectors. Job growth is still positive in each of these sectors but projected to increase at less than two-thirds the rate of the previous decade (from "BLS Releases 2002-2012 Employment Projections," at Table 1).

BLS's ranking of the fastest growing occupations is based on the expected rate of growth between 2002 and 2012. However, this calculation does not account for the proportion of the workforce that will actually benefit from such growth – meaning that a projected 100 percent increase of jobs in a category that currently employs 1000 people is ranked higher than an anticipated 50 percent increase in a category that employs millions. As BLS analysts acknowledge in their report, “Tomorrow’s Jobs,” only two occupations that rank among the 20 fastest growing also appear among the 20 occupations with the largest numerical increase. These are home health aides and personal and home care aides. According to BLS data, home health aides received a mean annual wage of \$19,050 in 2002, while personal and home care aides made an average of \$16,790 (figures from the BLS survey, *Occupational Employment and Wages*, 2002).

***OFFSHORING DEFENDER’S FICTION:*** “*The positions with the largest absolute growth also tend to be high-paying*”

***FACT:*** *Seven of the ten occupations with the largest projected job growth pay much less than average wages.*

Bartlett specifically refers to only three occupations out of the top ten that the BLS expects to have the largest absolute job growth between 2002 and 2012. The seven other occupations with the largest projected job growth – of which Bartlett carefully omits any mention – include retail salespersons, customer service representatives, combined food preparation and serving workers, cashiers, janitors, waiters and nursing aides. BLS wage estimates for these occupations are well below the mean annual wage (\$35,000) for all occupations: retail salespersons made an average of \$21,750 in 2002; the average wage for food preparation and serving workers in 2002 was \$15,150; customer service representatives took home an average of \$28,240; cashiers were paid an average of \$16,680; janitors and cleaners, \$20,150; waiters and waitresses, \$15,770, and nursing aides, orderlies and attendants, \$20,540. In total, these seven lower-paying categories omitted by Bartlett, are expected to account for over three million of the 4.7 million jobs forecast to be created in these 10 occupational categories.

***OFFSHORING DEFENDER’S FICTION:*** “*Almost all these positions require significant education and training... those requiring little training will tend to decline*”

***FACT:*** *Seven of the ten occupations with the largest projected job growth have no formal education requirements and involve only limited on-the-job training.*

As described above, seven of the ten occupations identified by BLS as having the “largest job growth, 2002-12” have no formal education requirements. Far from declining, BLS projects that positions in these occupation categories will increase 13-25% between 2002

and 2012. Total employment over the same period, in contrast, is only expected to grow by 15%. These jobs require little education and limited training *and* pay well below average wages – yet the numbers of positions in these areas are projected by BLS to grow at a faster-than-average rate through 2012.