

Nation at Risk VI, Including a Partial Misunderstanding of the Risk

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Here it is, '[Nation at Risk](#)' [VI](#): *America's Skills Challenge: Millennials and the Future*.

How many prominent, well-grounded proclamations of doom and gloom do we need before we widely recognize that the changes we've made since [Nation at Risk I](#) in 1983, plus [four more along](#) the way, have not (despite massively increased per pupil funding) addressed the [root causes](#) of persistently poor academic outcomes?

But beyond bringing the latest prominent alarm to your attention, my aim is to differ somewhat from the mainstream in describing the nature of the risk. The typical concern is that ebbing skill levels directly threaten our "[international competitiveness](#)." Indeed, that may be an indirect effect. I believe that the direct threat of ebbing skill levels, regardless of international rankings of literacy and numeracy, is political. As Thomas [Jefferson warned](#) long ago (confirmed by recent US loss of [economic freedom](#)): "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what **never** was and **never** will be." Our plunge from #1 among nations (#3 behind Hong Kong and Singapore) to #17 in the Fraser Institute [Economic Freedom of the World Index](#) says our growing inability to discern bad policy, and reject leadership promoting it, has us well underway to proving Jefferson, right. Ebbing citizenship skills will first rob us of our freedoms, then our competitiveness and prosperity.