
REMAPPING DEBATE

Asking "Why" and "Why Not"

If you don't see it, you can't solve it

Kudos | By Remapping Debate

November 23, 2010 — Kudos to the team of reporters at The American Prospect for highlighting how the failure to collect data on a variety of public policy issues undermines the ability to address those issues thoughtfully and accurately. The story is called "[What We Don't Know Can Hurt Us.](#)"

The article points out a variety of problems: data that are collected, but are not easily accessible or comparable; data that rely on questionable measurements, and data that is not collected at all.

The way that a narrow definition of a problem drives decisions as to what data are not collected is well illustrated in the story's section on the movement of jobs overseas. It is easy to understand the concept of the U.S. losing jobs to China or elsewhere — though it would be easier if, as the story points out, the Bureau of Labor Statistics tracked layoffs involving fewer than 50 workers (small cuts that add up).

But job loss encompasses more than layoffs. New jobs being created in countries other than the U.S. as a result of trade, labor, and other policies that disfavor domestic job creation are effectively jobs lost to U.S. workers, though the BLS does not include those jobs in its "movement of work" data.

Also of note in the piece is the section on "What kind of jobs are created by public investments" which discloses that there is a tremendous amount that we don't know about the jobs created by the Obama Administration's \$787 billion stimulus plan: "who's getting them, how long they last, or how much they pay. We also don't know if one job is a single full-time job or if four people are working 10 hours a week."

This information, if available, would yield a more nuanced view of the relative success or failure of job creation — full-time jobs with benefits that pay a living wage fuel prosperity in a way part-time, low paying, no-benefit jobs cannot.

Additional reporting is provided on missing data on finance, housing, health, education, and campaign finance.

This content originally appeared at <http://remappingdebate.org/article/if-you-dont-see-it-you-cant-solve-it>