

AI is coming

The only question is who will control it

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On Aug. 6, 1989, what would become the internet went live for the first time at CERN. While working there, Tim Berners-Lee, a British scientist, invented the World Wide Web to improve information-sharing among scientists around the world. Less than four years later, CERN put the World Wide Web software in the public domain, and the rest is history.

I mention this because the world is once again on the brink of a technology-driven transformation. Like the internet, the personal computer and the cellphone, artificial intelligence is going to change pretty much everything — national security, health care, communications, transportation, agriculture, most jobs and even the nature of work itself.

As you think about all of that, the most important thing to understand is that artificial intelligence will happen with or without American involvement in its development. All the bleating from people such as Sen. Bernard Sanders and the delays from people such as Gov. Kathy Hochul in New York might change the trajectory or timing of AI, but they will not stop others on this planet from mastering it. If we take Mr. Sanders' preferred path, AI will still be developed, except it will be developed by those who engage in slavery, those whose economy is built on child labor and repression, those who commit genocide.

All of the nonsense about data centers increasing electricity prices (they don't), using too much water (keeping our lawns green uses about 200 times as much water as data centers) and taking up too much land (we use more land to grow almonds in California) is irrelevant. So is the focus on pledges that data centers will pay for the electricity they use. Of course they will, just like every other ratepayer does.

The simple reality is that either AI is a generational opportunity that, should we master it, will transform the world for the better, in which case we need to stop wasting time with misleading propaganda, or it is a distraction and a triviality that can safely be ignored, irrespective of the intense interest of communists in Beijing.

We all know that it is not trivial. Like all paradigm-shifting technology, whoever masters AI will hold the economic heights for generations. The British and Americans dominated the world in the 19th century in large measure because they dominated the Industrial Revolution. The 20th century was an American century in large measure because of our

dominance in steel, automobiles, airplanes and assembly lines. In 1990, America and Europe were about even economically; since then, because of our mastery of the digital world, our GDP is about 30% larger than that of our allies in the European Union.

Of course, this kind of thing brings out the worst in everyone. In Texas, the governor proposed a \$33 billion effort to build more transmission lines and power plants and to compromise private property rights. That resulted in a mess, causing everyone to take a step back. On the other side, Team Sanders, motivated, as always, by their generalized dislike of other humans, has encouraged a moratorium on data centers, so the communists in Beijing can catch up to us. Or perhaps they want a moratorium because the last thing collectivists can tolerate is people earning more cash. Abundance fosters a sense of freedom; I can't have that. No doubt, numerous new billionaires and millionaires will be minted as a result of artificial intelligence. No doubt many of those people will be repulsive and unworthy of the fame and fortune they will collect. None of that matters. When you think about data centers and artificial intelligence, ignore the propaganda. Understand that the question at hand is not whether AI is going to happen: it already is. The only question we face is whether we are going to develop and master AI or leave it to someone else. As you think about that, keep in mind that you are either a master of technology or it is the master of you.

There is no third option.