

"Blue Collar Computing" To Boost Manufacturing Sector?

[Brad Kenney](#)

IT Editor, IndustryWeek

Senators Herb Kohl (D-WI) and George Voinovich (R-OH) joined their House colleague Representative Tim Ryan (D-OH) in introducing legislation they say is aimed at making enterprise-level systems and applications scalable, accessible and affordable to the small and midsize business (SMB) market.

This bipartisan "Blue Collar Computing" act is designed to give the struggling local and regional U.S. manufacturing sector a boost as it transitions to a globally competitive marketplace, and is based on an innovative program of the same name created by the [Ohio Supercomputer Center](#) (OSC).

The bills authorize up to \$25 million per year for 5 years for the U.S. Department of Commerce to create up to five Advanced Multidisciplinary Computing Software Centers across the country to foster collaborations between organizations with strong economic development credentials in supercomputing and small businesses/manufacturers seeking to employ technology to maximize performance.

If the bill is passed and the centers funded, they are tasked to:

- Assist with the transfer of new technologies from federally-funded projects.
- Provide new supercomputing technologies to small businesses and manufacturers.
- Identify business needs and create repositories of modeling software.
- Adapt software packages that will run efficiently on supercomputing systems.
- Provide small businesses and industries with the same innovative advantage as large firms.

According to the [press release](#), eligible organizations must meet a set of criteria including but not limited to:

- Links to state-funded schools and universities with recognized expertise in specific industries.
- A partnership history with small businesses and manufacturers.
- Experience in educating organizations on use of these technologies.

Good idea or not, could something like this actually come together? I mean, apart from the U.S. government spending money on domestic programs, who would participate on the tech side?

I mean, although I can't think of a single top tier vendor that doesn't have all three criteria already on the line, it's hard to argue that any of the bigger fish in the IT pond will be jumping onto the hook (can anyone tell I just got back from a fishing vacation?) for what is realistically a drop in the bucket -- "up to" \$25 million spread out over five places for five years?

Regardless, it's a nice sentiment, and a good start, and seeing as how many manufacturing SMBs have been going belly-up , you know they can use whatever help they can get.

After all, one thing that's not arguable is that better IT equals better, more competitive manufacturing companies -- and that's true at any level of the food chain.

In their introduction, the bills' sponsors generously note the following benefits:

- "Computer technologies provide companies with innovative tools that allow for the virtual development of new and improved products, such as cars, pharmaceuticals and financial products.
- Virtual modeling and simulation also provide companies with a competitive edge through improved manufacturing process design to bring products to market quicker, reducing development time, cost and labor.
- Simulation makes choosing between alternative processing methods far easier.
- Better analysis and documentation of capabilities helps with efficiency.
- Improved factory and workflow layouts increase productivity."

"All of these factors can dramatically improve a company's bottom line and increase its competitive edge in the global marketplace," the release says.

Fairly obvious, sure, but still nice to hear.