

Protect Diversity in Chips Workforce

The Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) has pushed back production at its second Arizona foundry. The remaining major chipmaker, Samsung, just delayed its first Texas fab. EV battery manufacturer Rivian has pushed out the date to start operations in Georgia despite millions invested by the state to purchase land and offer tax break incentives. Some causes for the slowdown may be the difficulty in demonstrating support for DEI by firms based outside the US.

The Chips and Science Act directly addresses fundamental needs for a skilled, diverse semiconductor workforce and contains 19 sections aimed at helping minority groups, and several prioritizing scientific cooperations with what it calls “minority-serving institutions.” A section called “**Opportunity and Inclusion**” instructs the Department of Commerce to work with minority-owned businesses and make sure chipmakers “*increase the participation of economically disadvantaged individuals in the semiconductor workforce.*” Because equity is so critical, the makers of critical chips and EV technology must rely on recruitment and local labor pools, many of which have low numbers from historically underrepresented groups. DOC is under some pressure to cut developers some slack on equity. For example, manufacturers are challenged in gender diversity because less than 10 percent of U.S. construction workers are women. Manufacturers are urged to remove degree requirements for positions that can be filled by persons with experience and less than a BS degree. State politics where

FAB and EV battery production are planned have been an issue and not necessarily supportive of the Act diverse workforce expectations.

Meanwhile, Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo admirably is planning to launch a CHIPS-funded training program for historically black colleges. The CHIPS Act's current identity is not a jobs program for favored minorities. It strengthens our economy and protects national security.

Diversity in high tech has always been a problem, but it should not be treated as a bridge too far.