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Massachusetts hand-dryer maker gets helping hand from U.S.-China trade war



Excel Dryer vice president of marketing and key accounts, Bill Gagnon, works at the factory in East Longmeadow, Massachusetts, U.S., October 25, 2019. REUTERS/Tim Aepfel

EAST LONGMEADOW, Mass. (Reuters) - The U.S.-China trade war is creating something William Gagnon once thought impossible - a 100% American-made bathroom hand dryer.

Excel Dryer vice president of marketing and key accounts, Bill Gagnon, works at the factory in East Longmeadow, Massachusetts, U.S., October 25, 2019. REUTERS/Tim Aepfel Gagnon's family-owned company, Excel Dryer Inc, sells about \$40 million worth of dryers a year that mostly go into public bathrooms, including at airports and casinos as well as at Starbucks Corp (SBUX.O) and Walmart Inc (WMT.N) stores across the United States.

The Western Massachusetts company uses parts made in the United States at its 50-employee factory, except for the motors and electronic controllers at their core. They long sought a domestic supplier for those items, but nobody could beat China's low prices. Until now.

One challenge for manufacturers who want to produce Made in USA products is that their supply chains, especially for things like electronics and motors, have migrated overseas in search of cheaper alternatives - something the Trump administration vowed to address with tariffs.

But pulling supply chains back to the United States is proving hard to do. Many U.S. factories, including the Apple Inc (AAPL.O) plant in Texas that President Donald Trump

recently toured, have instead scrambled to obtain tariff exemptions for key imported parts. Other producers are simply shifting to buying key parts from other low-cost producers in Asia, sidestepping the tariffs. Excel's new motors are a rare example of a tariff success.

Within a few months, Excel will roll out its first all-American dryers, said Gagnon, with motors and controllers built by a company in Tennessee.

"We'd actually be willing to pay a little more for U.S.-made," but due to the tariffs and the reduced cost of shipping from a domestic factory, the parts will end up costing less, he said, pointing to a prototype of a motor and controller on the table in front of him.

Tariffs implemented by the Trump administration pushed up the cost of Excel's Chinese parts by 25% last year and, like many small companies, Excel lacked the resources to invest in seeking an exemption in Washington. Instead, the company viewed it as an opportunity. It was already working on upgrading its motor designs, making changes that among other things will quadruple the life of the machines.

Average retail prices for Excel's dryers range from \$400 to \$700 per unit. The global hand dryer business is sur-

prisingly competitive, with the U.S. market still dominated by paper towels.

This is one reason a sign above Excel's office door bears the slogan "Time to Throw in the Towel."

AMERICAN DRYERS HEADED FOR BRITAIN The United States imported \$11.5 million worth of hand dryers in 2018, the vast majority from China, according to U.S. Census Bureau data. As tariffs have kicked in, U.S. imports of hand dryers from China have edged down - declining nearly 9% since 2016 - while imports from Spain and Japan have increased.

"We hope that more customers will be like this - once they see the total cost involved," said Adam Finch, director of engineering at the Fairview, Tennessee, factory that will produce the new motor. Finch's plant is part of the Scott Fetzer Co, which is owned by Berkshire Hathaway (BRKa.N).

Finch said many customers come to him because they want a small number of motors made - which is easier to do at a domestic plant - or if they are developing a new device that will be offshored to save money once it is perfected. In the case of Excel, the work will flow the other way: the Tennessee factory is in the process of moving tooling from China to the United States as it gears up production for Excel.



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China’s English proficiency scale links to TOEFL

BEIJING, Dec. 11 (Xinhua) -- An examination institution affiliated with China’s Ministry of Education and the U.S.-based Educational Testing Service (ETS) Wednesday jointly released the results of their collaborative research on linking TOEFL iBT to China’s Standards of English Language Ability (CSE).

The research results show the cutoff scores of the TOEFL iBT test mapped to CSE levels, according to a statement issued by the ministry’s National Education Examinations Authority (NEEA) and the ETS.

According to the results, a total score of 87 in the

TOEFL iBT test is equivalent to CSE level 7, while a total score of 101 is equivalent to CSE level 8.

“The research will help Chinese students, schools and test-takers understand the requirements and scores of the international examination and be better prepared,” said Yu Han, deputy head of the NEEA.

The TOEFL iBT test measures learners’ four skills of reading, listening, speaking and writing in English at the university level, with a total score ranging between 0 and 120.

The CSE, the first full-range English proficiency scale

designed for Chinese English learners and users, was released by authorities in February 2018. It categorizes the ability of Chinese English learners into nine proficiency levels across the three broad stages of basic, intermediate and advanced. The collaborative research focuses on CSE levels 4 to 8.

8 more countries set up Confucius institutes or classrooms in 2019

CHANGSHA, Dec. 11 (Xinhua) -- Eight countries have established their inaugural Confucius Institutes or classrooms in 2019, according to an international conference.

These countries are Haiti, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, the Commonwealth of Dominica, the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, the Maldives and Saudi Arabia, according to the 2019 International Chinese Language Education Conference that ended Tuesday in central China’s Hunan Province.

With these countries included, a total of 162 countries and regions have established 550 Confucius Institutes and 1,172 Confucius classrooms.

In 2019, 27 new Confucius Institutes and 66 Confucius classrooms have been set up.

These language programs serve as a bridge for deeper understanding, communication and cooperation around the world, said Chinese Vice Minister of Education Tian Xuejun at the closing ceremony of the conference.

China's gene-sequencing giant BGI to join UAE genome project

SHENZHEN, Dec. 11 (Xinhua) -- China’s top gene-sequencing provider BGI will participate in the Genome Program, which aims to use genomic data to improve health outcomes in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the company announced Wednesday.

The program plans to use large-scale genomic data to establish a health care system with predictable, preventative and individual-based medical treatment for the UAE people, according to the Shenzhen-based company.

It will be executed and delivered by the Abu Dhabi-based tech giant Group 42 in collaboration with companies including BGI.

BGI’s technology, sequencing equipment and analytic capability stood out from the competition and will provide core technological support for the program, said Wang Jian, chairman of BGI.

BGI, founded in 1999, specializes in the research of genomics in the healthcare, agriculture and environmental sectors.

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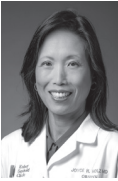
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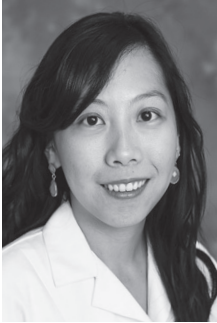
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“I am a strong advocate of promoting health and wellness to my patients, especially in the pediatric population. I want to make a difference and have a strong, healthy impact on my patients’ lives.”

~Jennifer Lai, M.D.

Dr. Lai is a board-certified pediatrician who earned her medical degree from The University of Texas School of Medicine in San Antonio and completed her pediatric internship and residency at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston. She is a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Her special clinical interests include General Pediatrics, caring for newborns, managing autism, and treating childhood obesity. She cares for young patients at Kelsey-Seybold’s Tanglewood Clinic, near the Galleria.

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Editor's Choice



Britain's Home Secretary Priti Patel speaks during a final general election campaign event in London



Investors monitor a screen displaying stock information at the Saudi Stock Exchange (Tadawul) following the debut of Saudi Aramco's initial public offering (IPO) on the Riyadh's stock market, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, December 11, 2019. REUTERS/Ahmed Yosri



Police officers try to detain demonstrators during a protest against the Citizenship Amendment Bill, in Agartala



Court hearings in case against Myanmar on alleged genocide of Rohingya, at the ICJ in The Hague



Demonstration outside the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague



Workers unload the numerals 2 and 0 for News Year's Eve in Times Square in the Manhattan borough of New York City



2018 literature Nobel laureate Olga Tokarczuk meets children at Rinkeby school library outside Stockholm



Liberal Democrats leader Jo Swinson's general election campaign

Federal Agencies Have Until November 19th To Come Up With A Solution- Congressional OK Also Needed

Trump Lowering The Number Of Refugees Permitted Into U.S. To 18,000



The Trump administration also plans to prioritize refugees who have been persecuted for religious beliefs, Iraqis who have helped the U.S. overseas, and legitimate refugees from Northern Triangle countries, per the release.
(Photo/AFP via Getty Images)

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

The Trump administration is proposing to cut the number of refugees permitted to resettle in the U.S. next year to just 18,000 — down from a record-low of 30,000 last year, according to a State Department press release on Thursday.
Why it matters: The administration also plans to prioritize refugees who have been persecuted for religious beliefs, Iraqis who have helped the U.S. overseas, and legitimate refugees from Northern Triangle countries, per the release. This would be the fourth time the Trump administration lowered the refugee cap, and it had reportedly discussed lowering it to zero. There are more displaced people in the world today than at any point since World War II, according to the United Nations.
In addition, Trump issued an Executive Order on Thursday evening instructing

the federal government to resettle refugees only in jurisdictions where state and local governments have consented to receive those refugees, with “limited exceptions.”



Acting Homeland Security Secretary Kevin McAleenan said in a statement that the new refugee cap will allow DHS “to focus on addressing the ongoing crisis at the southern border, reducing a staggering asylum backlog that unfairly delays relief for those with meritorious claims...”

Between the lines: The asylum system and high number of applicants was also mentioned in the State Department press release. Advocates for cutting the refugee cap often argue that the high numbers of asylum seekers the U.S. allows in compensates for cutting the refugee cap — both forms of humanitarian protection for those who have been forced to flee their home nations.
“The current burdens on the U.S. immigration system must be alleviated before it is again possible to resettle large number of refugees,” the press release said. Jared Kushner has also argued that the money spent on bringing refugees into the U.S. would be better spent helping countries already hosting refugees.
The big picture: Trump has made it more difficult for victims and refugees to find help in the U.S.
His administration has repeatedly tried to thwart asylum seekers through new regulations.
Denial rates for visas intended for victims of crime or human trafficking have risen.
The administration has also ended Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for hundreds of thousands of immigrants from nations such as El Salvador, Haiti, Sudan and Nicaragua — although the courts have kept the protected status alive for now.

Related

Millions of immigrant files physically stored in underground Missouri cave
Officials are trying to carry out President Trump’s months-old directive demanding that sponsors of immigrants pay the government for the costs when those immigrants used certain public benefits. But to tabulate that, they have to go through a cave in Missouri.



Acting Director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)

Ken Cuccinelli. Photo: Chen Meng-tong/China News Service/Visual China Group via Getty Images
The bottom line: The majority of those immigration files — including sponsors’ information — are located on physical sheets of paper often stored in a large, underground facility in Kansas City’s limestone caves, multiple current and former government officials tell Axios.
•“The cave stores more than 20 million immigration files, and we add 1.5 million new files every year,” a U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Facebook post from 2014 says.
The state of play: An interagency working group has had monthly calls with the White House to work out a system, an administration official tells Axios. But

it’s proved a complicated — if not impossible — task.
•“An alien’s file could be hundreds of pages long,” the official said. “It’s almost comical.”
USCIS’ former chief counsel, Ur Jad-dou, said the agency has databases with some immigrant data points, and it has digitized a handful of forms — but there is no simple way to find an immigrant’s sponsor.
•Family-based visas — one of the most common visas requiring sponsors — are handled entirely on paper, another former USCIS official said.
The response: A spokesperson said USCIS is continuing to work on digitizing records. (Courtesy Axios.com)

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**Climate Change, Automation And Loss Of Jobs
Are Issues That Will Impact The 2020 Election**

**Automation Is 2020's
Least Understood Issue**

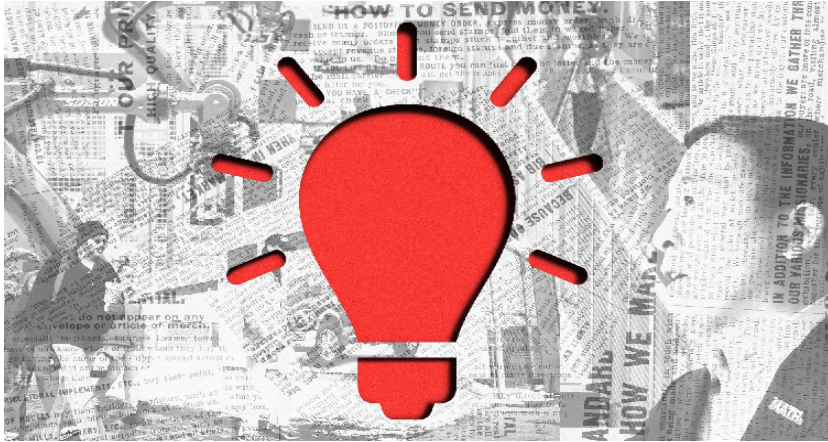


Photo Illustration/Axios. (Photos/China News Service/VCG via Getty Images)

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

Automation is one of the big sleeper issues of the 2020 presidential campaign. Most candidates aren't focusing on it by name, even though it profoundly shapes key themes in the race: the U.S. economy, jobs and friction between the haves and have-nots.

Why it matters: "If we stay on the trajectory we're on currently, we're going to have greater income inequality, less social mobility, greater political unrest and greater income insecurity," says Elisabeth Reynolds, executive director of the MIT Task Force on the Work of the Future.

•Unchecked, job losses from automation could knock out bottom rungs of traditional career paths, worsen inequality and increase political polarization.

•Fast advances in AI and robotics threaten to fundamentally alter both low- and high-skilled jobs, increasing the urgency for political leaders to address the issue, Reynolds says.

The big picture: The effects of automation fit into a puzzle that includes trade policy. But while trade and China hog political attention, automation gets passed over, leaving a gaping hole

in critical preparations for the future of work.

•Estimates of coming American job loss to automation range wildly, from 10% to 47%. But even the most conservative calculations threaten millions of workers.

•Technology could also create as many as 50 million new jobs by 2030 and step in where workers are scarce. Where those new jobs will arrive remains unclear.



Where it stands: The 2020 field is split on automation, and not just along party lines.

•Andrew Yang made it one of his key-stone campaign issues. "We have to stop denying the effects of automation on our people and focus on 21st-century solutions to these problems," he wrote in a recent NYT op-ed.

•Sen. Elizabeth Warren has taken the opposite stance. The automation argument is "a good story, except it's not really true," Warren has written. She argued in a recent debate that job insecurity is actually all about "bad trade policy."

•When they talk about automation, the rest of the Democrats fall between those two. Sen. Bernie Sanders, for example, proposes guaranteeing federal jobs for displaced workers, in contrast to Yang's basic income plan. And Mayor Pete Buttigieg, who chairs a mayoral task force on automation, has emphasized education programs in South Bend, Indiana.

•Meanwhile, President Trump focuses his blame for economic woes on trade — and on immigration, which economic experts say is a red herring.

There's a lack of "original thinking" on the issue from the candidates, says MIT economist Daron Acemoglu.

•The debate gets muddy because automation is tied up with other massive forces threatening the economy, including trade. Plus, it's hard to disentangle the potential upsides from the pain, or put hard numbers on either.

•But Warren's hard-line trade-only argument is "too extreme," says Reynolds. "I think we know that it's both automation and trade."

•"There are high levels of uncertainties here and that only makes it a more queasy issue," says Brookings' Mark Muro. "Some will benefit; some won't. Parts of jobs could go away, but other new parts emerge."

Voters, too, may be underestimating the importance of automation. Instead, their views are largely a litmus test for their politics.

•When Gallup and Northeastern University asked Americans to rate the seriousness of various threats to jobs earlier this year, 56% of Republicans said immigration is a major threat, compared to just 5% of Democrats.

•By contrast, 60% of Democrats said increased trade barriers are a major threat, versus 17% of Republicans.

•AI, which underlies automation, was less important for both parties: 35% of

Democrats and 34% of Republicans said AI was a major threat.

The bottom line: For the gravity of the changes it's bringing, automation deserves more emphasis than it's getting.

Related
What makes the 2020 election historic for climate change



Photo Illustration/Axios.
(Photo/Getty Images)

Climate change is playing a larger — and more polarizing — role than ever before in a presidential election.

Why it matters: In the past, the topic barely registered with voters and candidates were less polarized. Today, all Democratic candidates are treating it as a crisis, with detailed plans and funding sources to address it, while President Trump ignores the problem and bashes those plans.

Driving the news: In the Nov. 20 Democratic presidential debate, Joe Biden called climate change "the" existential threat to humanity, while Pete Buttigieg championed the notion of a "carbon-negative" farm. Billionaire Tom Steyer said if elected he would call a state of emergency over climate change on his first day in office.

•Billionaire Michael Bloomberg, who officially announced his candidacy on Sunday, has spent \$500 million in recent years on global climate-related efforts, and in June he committed another \$500 million for a Beyond Carbon initiative.

The big picture: The impacts of climate change, like more intense wildfires and more severe flooding, are increasing in frequency. Meanwhile, ways to solve the problem, like renewable energy, are becoming more affordable, even while the science increasingly says the problem is growing more dire.

•These developments taken together are

making climate change a tangible issue for broader swaths of the population than in the past — so it's permeating our politics in new and forceful ways.

Between the lines: Multiple surveys of public opinion show Americans' growing concern about climate change being driven almost entirely by Democrats.

•Democrats are looking to clamp down significantly on fossil fuels and enact ever-more aggressive and expensive plans, embodied by rhetoric surrounding the Green New Deal.



Where it stands: Trump mocks and rejects mainstream climate-change science and is repealing virtually everything predecessor Barack Obama's administration did on the matter.

•Trump will attack the ultimate Democratic nominee's climate change plan as radical, while that person will attack the president for denying science. Don't expect an inch of common ground.

But, but, but: Climate change is unlikely to be the top issue for most voters in 2020.

•The complexity and decades-long nature of this problem makes it uniquely ill-suited for politics operating on two- to six-year cycles and makes it unlikely to ever be the top priority for any sizable portion of the population.

•More imminent concerns, like health care and the economy, will almost always win out with most voters.

The bottom line: That all said, we're entering a new high-water mark for climate change and its political saliency. (Courtesy Axios.com)

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