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Invite Me In!

by The Honorable Donald Manzullo

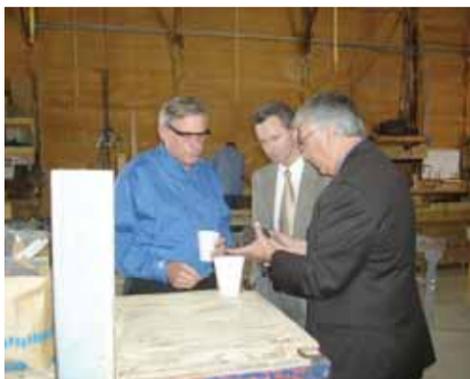
Lawmaker plant tours are effective!

The mind and the mouth can think and talk about the most amazing things, but in the end it takes the hands to make them so. Since Moses asked God to bless his hands that they may do good work, man has relied on the skill of his hands to build civilization. That's why it troubles me that as America stands at the pinnacle of its economic greatness, its reliance on manufacturing—the labor of the hands—is in decline.

I grew up in Rockford, IL, where tool and die manufacturers dominated the local economy. My family owned a local restaurant that served plant workers and their families, so I witnessed first hand the important roles both small businesses and a vibrant manufacturing base play in a healthy community. Unfortunately, I have had to watch many of those manufacturers shut their gates and either move operations overseas or close completely. When I was elected to Congress in 1992, I knew that one of my top priorities would be strengthening manufacturing in America.

After losing 2.3 million U.S. manufacturing jobs in the first three years of the new millennium, I was driven to bring my colleagues together to address this crisis. In 2003, I founded the House Manufacturing Caucus to find ways to preserve manufacturing jobs in this country and educate fellow lawmakers on the ramifications of losing the industrial sector of our economy. Out of these efforts, I also created what I call my "Agenda to Restore Manufacturing in America."

One of the priorities in the plan, helping manufacturers prosper and create jobs for Americans, was accomplished in October 2004 when President Bush signed into law the American Jobs Creation Act of 2004, which provides a nine percent tax deduction for manufacturing production in the United States. I made it a personal mission to ensure Congress incen-



tivized job creation in the United States and included small manufacturers as beneficiaries.

Much can be done, however, and manufacturers themselves can play a big role. On Capitol Hill, education is one of the biggest challenges I see. There are so many things going on that it can be difficult for lawmakers to stay informed on every issue and perspective. I can also attest that you meet many new people every day, and keeping names, faces, and their issues straight takes a lot of work.

You as a manufacturer have one huge way to differentiate yourself from the masses. You have a production facility, where people and complex machines interact to build unique products. Invite your Member of Congress to tour your facility. At your company, you are not limited to sharing your concerns with your lawmakers sitting behind a desk. You can instead walk around your plant and point out aspects of your operations that may be affected by laws they pass.

Ultimately, you can show them the process of turning raw materials into finished goods. As a lawmaker who has toured numerous plants across the country and around the world, that is the magic that sticks in my mind. To this day, I can vividly remember the plant tours I have taken, and how I marveled at the ingenuity behind how things are made. I remember too, the company owners who took me on each tour of their facility and the concerns they had.

Today, I know that you, as a manufacturer, are facing a number of tough issues. In the U.S., there has been a dramatic shift away from the trades and manufacturing skills to a service-based economy. That means schools have not prepared our youth for careers in these fields, and the conse-

quences are evident. One of the loudest complaints I hear from employers in the northern Illinois district I represent is they can't find qualified people to fill job openings. Not only is there a shortage of workers, there's a gap between the skills they have and the skills required to do the work.

As health care costs continue to increase, so too does the price of health insurance. I have heard from numerous employers that finding and providing affordable health care coverage for employees has become exceedingly difficult. There have been numerous solutions proposed in Congress to address this issue, but we need to hear from employers like you on which plan will be most effective for the situation you face.

Aspects of the U.S. tax code, like the death tax, continue to devastate manufacturers and small businesses. Too many family farms and small businesses have been forced to sell because they can't afford to pay the tax bill in addition to normal business costs. If you find yourself potentially facing this situation, let your lawmakers know how the estate tax affects you.

With these issues, and many others like immigration and tort reform facing manufacturing employers, I encourage you to take a proactive step and invite your lawmaker to take a tour of your facility. It will give you an opportunity to build an important connection and relationship, as well as a chance to share your concerns in a unique environment that will stick in the lawmaker's mind. Impart on them the important role you play in the local economy, not only as an employer, but as a manufacturer that helps build the community with its hands. **SBC**

The Honorable Donald Manzullo (R-IL) Chair, House Small Business Committee

Congressman Manzullo represents the 16th Congressional District of Illinois. In 2006, he is continuing his mission to restore manufacturing in America and create good-paying jobs for the people of northern Illinois and throughout our nation. In his sixth year as Chairman of the U.S. House Committee on Small Business, Manzullo has held more than 60 hearings on the state of manufacturing in America and introduced numerous pieces of legislation to make U.S. companies more competitive so they can expand and create jobs. He also founded the 80-member House Manufacturing Caucus, which he chairs.

Manzullo has earned the reputation as Congress' champion of manufacturing and a fierce advocate for job creation in northern Illinois. His "Agenda to Restore Manufacturing in America" outlines 17 priorities to preserve U.S. manufacturing and put Americans back to work. The plan's highlights include providing tax relief to companies, which keep jobs in America.

Congressman Manzullo annually earns recognition as a "Taxpayer's Hero" from Citizens Against Government Waste, a "Taxpayer's Friend" by the National Taxpayers Union, and he received the "Guardian of Small Business Award" from the National Federation of Independent Business numerous times. The National Association of Manufacturers has consistently honored him with the "Award for Manufacturing Legislative Excellence."

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