

Comments from Jay Timmons
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Thank you, everyone. I also want to thank you, Heidi, for that introduction—but more importantly for your leadership. We are grateful for your vision, your dedication, and your commitment. The Aluminum Association is lucky to have you, and the NAM and CMA are fortunate to have you as well.

Thank you for your ability to look beyond the present, anticipate future challenges, broaden our perspective and drive us forward. I know you are a role model for so many leaders inside and outside this room.

This is the kind of thinking that we need in our associations, in the business community.

At a time when our politics feels crazy and demoralizing, when outsiders are questioning the role of associations, it can feel tempting to wall ourselves off and focus on a narrow set of issues.

When the country feels divided, when certain issues feel like a wedge driving people apart, when people's biases impact communities and create tension, it can be easy to duck our heads and think, "That's not our problem, that doesn't affect us, it's not a manufacturing issue."

But here's the truth: Not only is it our problem, but we are the solution. If we ignore it, we're adding to the harm.

Associations represent the best of American values: collaboration, consensus and coalition-building. By design trade associations "bring people together." That's what we do. And in times like these, we need to recommit ourselves to inclusiveness.

As association leaders, we have to affirm our commitment to the values – those four pillars – that make, and keep, America exceptional in the first place: free enterprise, competitiveness, individual liberty and equal opportunity.

When those values are challenged or undermined by our leaders—or people running to be our leaders—we have an obligation to speak out, even when it's from the party that has usually been a stronger ally for the business community. We have an obligation to speak out against isolationism, nativism, populism, xenophobia, racism and discrimination.

They are a threat to our country. They are a threat to our ability to compete in the world economy. They are a threat to our workforce—the men and women who makes things in America and make our member companies succeed.

At some time in our lives, we've all witnessed struggle and unfairness. I watched my mom rise through the ranks, overcome sexism to shatter a glass ceiling in the publishing industry in Ohio.

I watched my dad struggle to start a business during what was then the worst recession since the Great Depression.

And I've watched loving couples struggle to start or grow their families; I've experience that firsthand.

What's your story?

By acknowledging the frustrations that people are feeling in this country, we can shape the debate. And by shaping the debate, we can shape solutions. And, trust me, we have the solutions to produce a growing economy—and creating opportunity for those who are feeling hopeless.

Unfortunately for us, many in our country think that associations are part of the problem, even though we are the voice for millions of Americans. And, ladies and gentlemen, I submit to you that we will be very much part of the problem if we do not accept responsibility for using our might, our muscle, our influence to bring our nation back together.

Because at the end of the day, we're in the business of strengthening this country, and no one wins if our country is divided.

We have an obligation to look beyond Washington, to connect with people, to listen, to empathize, to share our stories. If we don't, companies may start looking for internal solutions to the problems that associations should be tackling.

And we need to remember that these issues are manufacturing issues. We can't duck our responsibility by thinking that they aren't priorities for manufacturers.

Ultimately, this election needs to be about laying the groundwork for working with the next administration— whoever is in charge—to deliver progress on the issues we care about.

Tax reform. Regulatory reform. Legal reform. We need to lay the ground for a serious investment in infrastructure. It's about building unity and real jobs. It's about finally catching up to the investments of our global competitors.

It's about taking a stand for what our country needs—even when it's difficult.

That's how we build a brighter future. That's how we strengthen manufacturing. And that's how we make America even greater. After all, when manufacturing succeeds, America succeeds.