

Remarks of Jay Timmons
President and CEO, National Association of Manufacturers
to the Council of Manufacturing Associations
Thursday, August 8, 2019

Well, good morning! That was a look back at our 2019 NAM State of Manufacturing Tour.

It was our fifth-annual roadshow, and by far the most successful, impactful one yet.

We saw some of you along the way. Robb MacKie joined us in Houston, and Mike Sommers, I know you planned to be there, but a D.C. snowstorm had other things in mind.

This year, our tour brought us to eight states and 25 cities and towns over two weeks.

We visited 13 large manufacturers, 13 small manufacturers, nine schools—and were welcomed by mayors, governors and senators.

And wherever we went, north, south, mid-Atlantic, Midwest, East Coast, West Coast...one fact remains the same: our leaders love manufacturing, and manufacturing workers love what they do.

There's an energy and enthusiasm that's contagious. And I think it comes from knowing that this is an industry on the rise...we're creating jobs, wages are rising, and companies are growing.

We have headwinds. We have challenges. But manufacturing is in the spotlight, and we are leading this country forward. There's never been a better time to be a part of this industry.

One thing we learned—or that was reaffirmed—is that it is never too early to start introducing young people to the opportunities in manufacturing.

The most enthusiastic students were ones who had learned about robotics or coding as early as elementary school. Yeah...elementary school.

On the tour, we also worked to debunk the myths around automation and modern technology. The narrative out there is that it means job losses. In reality, it makes work safer—and creates more jobs.

And we have to be clear: manufacturing workers actually love learning new technology.

We asked employees directly about the effect of technology on their jobs. One man had been in manufacturing for 30 years. He bragged that he learned more in the past five

years than in the previous 25. That's a story we heard over and over, from ABB to Jelly Belly and everything in between.

But the need to build our workforce is only becoming more urgent. Today we have more than half a million jobs to fill in manufacturing.

Research from The Manufacturing Institute and Deloitte says that we'll have 4.6 million jobs to fill by 2028, 2.4 million of which will go unfilled if we don't ramp up our efforts.

And that is why, as you saw last month, the NAM has launched an unprecedented capital campaign to bolster the work of The Manufacturing Institute and solve the workforce crisis.

We're calling this our Creators Wanted Campaign. It is an historic effort to build the manufacturing workforce and to mark our 125th anniversary.

It is the biggest fundraising effort in the association's history.

The 2020 presidential election coincides with our anniversary, so we have the chance to keep the spotlight on manufacturing and change perceptions of manufacturing careers during a critical presidential election year.

So, what exactly are we doing?

I'm going to explain. But first, take a look....

Half of the Creators Wanted Fund will support experiences in 2020 designed to change perceptions and recruit new talent.

The other half will be dedicated to scaling up the programs of The Manufacturing Institute, like Heroes MAKE America, the STEP Women's Initiative and more.

The 2020 initiatives include an 18-week Creators Wanted Tour of traveling exhibits across the country and a digital storytelling program.

It will all culminate in the Making America Festival in Cincinnati in September 2020, where we will convene industry leaders, manufacturing workers, policymakers and candidates.

We have ambitious goals for this project, and we'll be measuring our progress.

The campaign aims to...

- cut the skills gap by 600,000 workers by 2025;

- increase by 25 percent the number of students enrolling in technical and vocational schools;
- increase by 25 percent the number of students enrolling in apprenticeships and reskilling programs;
- and raise to 50 percent—from 27 percent—the number of parents who would encourage their children to pursue a career in modern manufacturing.

Like I said, this requires a significant fundraising effort, unlike anything we've done before—so we are very fortunate that our current board chair, Mike Lamach, and our past two board chairs, David Farr and David Seaton, have stepped up to lead it. Having them as co-chairs is a sign that the biggest names in manufacturing believe this effort is vital to our industry.

Our initial goal was to raise \$10 million. That's a lot, but I think we can exceed that. Our members believe in this campaign. They are excited. They want to be a part of it. We want you to be a part of it as well.

Erin Streeter is here and can talk to you about the opportunities for engagement. You will be integral to our success, and we'll be counting on you to make sure that this effort represents the full diversity of our industry.

Now, the Creators Wanted effort is big. But it's also just one example of what the modern association is being called to do—to think outside of the box, to go bold, to respond to member needs and to tackle the biggest challenges of the day.

In today's political climate, the business community must be a force for good. We are being called to lead. And for our part, manufacturers are going to answer that call.

Our country feels more divided than united—and it's not just Democrat versus Republican. There are doubts about our very system of free enterprise. There are racial divisions and socioeconomic tensions.

There's discrimination and bigotry. There are calls to "send people back" to where they came from.

There is hatred manifesting itself in unspeakable acts of violence, like what we witnessed in Texas and Ohio—and the tragedy Charleston, this great city, endured four years ago.

In California, Texas and Ohio, instead of enjoying the last lazy days of summer, parents are buying caskets and preparing to bury their children.

This senseless violence has impacted every person in this room as well—and you probably don't even know it. Two years ago on a site visit to prepare for this very meeting, NAM staff members Tonya Muse and Brian James were witness to a horrific mass shooting at a restaurant right down the street. Two people were shot and one was killed. And there would likely have been more victims if Tonya—the leader of this group meeting here today—had not heroically led restaurant patrons out a back entrance and down an alley to safety. Please help me recognize Tonya and Brian for their bravery. We thank God they are with us here today.

So, the question we have to grapple with is this: If we don't lead, who will?

We can't succeed if we're living in a fractured society when people feel marginalized—or fundamentally unsafe.

The 44th President of the United States said it beautifully earlier this week:

“...all of us have to send a clarion call and behave with the values of tolerance and diversity that should be the hallmark of our democracy.

“We should soundly reject language coming out of the mouths of any of our leaders that feeds a climate of fear and hatred or normalizes racist sentiments; leaders who demonize those who don't look like us, or suggest that other people, including immigrants, threaten our way of life, or refer to other people as sub-human, or imply that America belongs to just one certain type of people. Such language isn't new—it's been at the root of most human tragedy throughout history, here in America and around the world.

“It is at the root of slavery and Jim Crow, the Holocaust, the genocide in Rwanda and ethnic cleansing in the Balkans. It has no place in our politics and our public life. And it's time for the overwhelming majority of Americans of goodwill, of every race and faith and political party, to say as much—clearly and unequivocally.”

President Obama was right.

I will not sit idly by while our country disintegrates. And I hope you will not either. Our platforms are unique, and we must use them forcefully and effectively.

In recent years, you've seen the NAM speak out on some of the issues that don't fit into the usual “boxes” for trade associations. Sometimes in our words and sometimes in our example, we have worked to be a force for unity.

Sometimes it's hard to know what to do. There won't always be a clear answer. But we have that platform. We have respect, and we should endeavor to use it for the good of our country by setting ourselves apart and using language that unites, rather than divides.

And here's another reason why: too often, the only voices out there responding to these concerns and fears are those who are also calling for policies that would destroy free enterprise.

In other words, if we are not advocates for individual liberty and equal opportunity, Americans will be drawn to those voices who don't share our values of free enterprise and competitiveness. We can't succeed when politicians start chipping away at the free enterprise system that made this country's success possible in the first place.

If you tuned into the debates last week, you heard some astonishing stuff. And that's not a partisan statement.

I'm talking about when a candidate says, for example, that corporations, quote, "have no loyalty to America. They have no patriotism."

Now, it's one thing to have policy debates on health care and immigration and foreign policy.

But if we let this kind of thinking dominate our politics—the idea that the companies we represent don't care about this country and that the answer is some form of benign socialism...if that continues, we are in trouble.

And the answer isn't to go attacking these candidates one by one and getting defensive. And it isn't to side with one party over the other—because there's plenty of dangerous thinking on both sides of the aisle.

The answer is to redouble our efforts to show Americans the good that our companies and our members are doing every day. To change lives. To save lives. To make and keep America exceptional.

We can control our own narrative. But if we don't define the conversation, we will be defined by the conversation.

So, it's again going to be up to us—manufacturers, the NAM, and yes, the entire business community—to set the record straight.

Capitalism is a virtuous system and has done more to enhance people's lives than any other economic system ever conceived in the history of mankind.

We can do a better job demonstrating that we share the concerns of those who have grown to distrust our system...concerns like inequality, discrimination, education, health care, climate change and more. That's part of the conversation we'll have later today with author Raj Sisodia.

But it is free enterprise, not socialism, that has the power to lift more people up. We can fix the shortcomings of our system, but we cannot—must not—abandon it.

That's the philosophy that will continue to guide us forward at the NAM—whether we're advocating for

- passage of the USMCA;
- a bilateral trade agreement with China;
- reauthorization of the Export-Import Bank;
- investment in infrastructure; or
- a comprehensive immigration plan that provides security and compassion and addresses economic realities.

We champion those policies because it's the right thing to do for America.

As manufacturers, our values are the values that make America exceptional...free enterprise, competitiveness, individual liberty and equal opportunity. Our mission to uphold and advance those values has never mattered more.

And in the heat of a presidential election, we will be prepared not only to be a beacon for those values—but also to draw more candidates to support an agenda that advances them.

As manufacturers, we can lead the business community in this direction. We can't just play it safe. We can't just be "business as usual."

The men and women who make things in America are counting on us—and we have to deliver.