Americans Hungry For A Strong Manufacturing Sector

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Americans maintain remarkably consistent views on the importance of manufacturing despite year after year of economic turbulence, according to a new survey from Deloitte and The Manufacturing Institute, with 86 percent of respondents believing that America's manufacturing base is "important" or "very important" to their standard of living.

The "Public Viewpoint on Manufacturing" survey, now in its third year, polled a nationally representative sample of 1,000 Americans in August across all 50 states. With a margin of error for the entire sample of +/- three percentage points, the survey confirms Americans clearly value a strong manufacturing sector.

Most notably, when respondents were asked if they could create 1,000 new jobs in their community with any new facility, they ranked manufacturing at the top of the list -- ahead of energy production facilities, technology development centers, retail centers, banks or financial institutions and a host of others. Moreover, 79 percent of survey respondents say a strong manufacturing base should be a national priority.

"There is an unfortunate disconnect, however, between respondents wanting manufacturing jobs in their community and pursuing those very job opportunities for themselves," said emily Stover DeRocco, president, The Manufacturing Institute. "Survey results reveal that only one-third of parents would encourage their child to go into manufacturing, which translates into a major workforce pipeline issue. This, in turn, becomes a U.S. manufacturing competitiveness issue because we know that an educated and skilled 21st century workforce is the most important factor behind innovation and business success. As the industry faces major 'boomer' retirements, a shortage in the supply of new talent will directly impact a company's ability to

thrive and expand in the global economy."

"This year's findings are remarkably similar to those from the past three years. It's crystal clear -- Americans remain steadfast in their commitment to creating a strong, healthy, globally competitive manufacturing sector in the United States, regardless of the prevailing economic winds," said Craig Giffi, vice chairman and consumer & industrial products industry leader, Deloitte LLP.

Americans are looking for better leadership to support U.S. competitiveness

However, DeRocco warns that Americans "are not confident that policymakers are taking the right approach today to support U.S. competitiveness." She says that 83 percent of survey respondents either "strongly agree" or "agree" America needs a more strategic approach to develop its manufacturing base. This same attitude, she says, also applies to the public's views on current U.S. tax, trade and other government business policies. Less than one-third of the public sees any competitive advantage being created for U.S. businesses from current policies -- and more than two-thirds see current policies having a neutral or negative impact relative to our ability to compete with other nations.

According to the survey, the U.S. public is also unsure of the ability of both business and government leadership to create a competitive U.S. economy. The survey data reveals that 43 percent of respondents believe current business leadership provides an advantage to U.S. competitiveness versus all other countries. Conversely, only 26 percent and 29 percent respectively believe that federal and state leadership are helping create a competitive advantage for the U.S. versus all other countries.

Americans view the manufacturing sector as fragile and unstable

Respondents also believe the U.S. is facing a challenging and stubborn economic environment, particularly when it comes to job creation. Nearly three-fourths (72 percent) do not believe that the economy has been improving or is in better shape since 2008. More than two-thirds (67 percent) believe the economy remains weak and could fall back into recession. And, Americans are nearly evenly split on whether the economy will show significant signs of improvement by 2015.

Americans see manufacturing weakening over the longer term, too. In rating whether U.S. manufacturing is becoming stronger or weaker from a longer-term perspective, only 7 percent said it will likely be stronger while 55 percent opted for weaker.

According to Giffi, this means that the public has real concerns over manufacturing losing steam along with the economy. "While Americans' commitment to manufacturing is unwavering -- meaning that they would like to see more manufacturing jobs created and strengthen the areas of competitive advantage that the U.S. has relative to other nations -- they worry that these efforts may be undermined by the faltering economy and the nation's perceived lack of a competitiveness strategy."

The Manufacturing Institute is the non-profit, non-partisan affiliate of the National Association of Manufacturers dedicated to changing the face of manufacturing in the country so that policy makers (government), educators, and the public understand its importance and take action to sustain and expand the industry in the United States. The Institute's strategic agenda focuses on education reform and workforce development, innovation, and research. Visit http://institute.nam.org *[1].*

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