

Ellison: American businesses must grow and compete

Written by Lydia Schwartz
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US Rep. Keith Ellison (DFL-MN) is organizing his new 'Make it in America' agenda, aimed at rebuilding America's manufacturing sector.

Our manufacturing can be a source of national pride when businesses create good jobs for our nation's workers. "America's economy can only be made by our fellow Americans, when products are manufactured in America, creating living-wage jobs for American families," Ellison says.

Off-shoring has been a major contributing factor in our economic slowdown. It diminishes the operating workforce here in the US. "This is more than just wage competition," Ellison says. "Lawmakers need to hear from the people what the government can do to help businesses grow and compete."

American businesses should not chase lower international wages at the expense of innovation. Harry Moser, founder of 'The Re-shoring Initiative', agrees that we must be an innovation country and a manufacturing country.

The Re-Shoring Initiative helps companies to better understand the full cost of off-shoring their operations overseas. They face the extra financial burdens of natural disasters, political instability, declining value of the US dollar, soaring oil prices, and other delivery problems.

Moser says that there are many financial benefits when companies re-shore their operations to the US. "We are working to change the mindset for businesses to reflect the fact that keeping operations local reduces the total cost of ownership," he says. "Re-shoring is not only the best way to keep your own job, it will help eliminate the trade deficit and to lower national unemployment."

E.J. Ajax and Sons Inc. is a third-generation progressive metal stamping contract-manufacturer located in Minneapolis. Ajax lays claim to fifty full-time employees and made it to the US Chamber of Commerce's 'Top 50 Small American Businesses' for 2011.

E.J. Ajax, the company's VP and Co-Owner, understands the direct benefits of keeping employment local and that they have a tremendous financial advantage to export their own products. He argues that "America can make money in three ways: technology, agriculture, and manufacturing. Everything else is just passing dollars".

Manufacturers are in the race of our lives in search of talent. Ajax is part of the 'M-Powered' program, which is dedicated to training entry- and incumbent-level workers for careers in precision metal forming. Minnesota HIRED, Hennepin Technical College, the National Association of Manufacturers, and other trade associations are also involved with this public-private partnership.

"If I can't find educated people to operate our machines," Ajax says, "Then we won't be able to buy those machines [from other manufacturers]. Collaboration and cooperation with competitors, partners, and educators has been the key to our success because we have come to understand each others' objectives."

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Former MN State Sen. Tarryl Clark (DFL-St. Cloud) agrees that we need a comprehensive plan that utilizes Minnesota's post-secondary schools as a key partner in the economic system to bring people back to work.

"We have to figure out how to harness all of the creativity and innovation into creating jobs. There is an interconnectedness with the community [because right now] people are just looking for any job," Clark says.

Clark recently joined a nationwide advocacy effort, the Blue Green Alliance, to maintain the jobs we have now, create new employment opportunities, and to ensure America leads the 21st century economy. This national partnership of labor unions and environmental organizations is dedicated to expanding the number of jobs in a quality, green economy.

"We can retool our current manufacturing industry to promote green power that is more efficient, safer, better for the environment, and the bottom line," Clark says. "Companies are looking at different packaging, reusing oil, better batteries and electricity storage, and green chemistry in plastics."

Dr. Lois Bollman, the VP of Academic and Student Affairs at Minneapolis Community and Technical College (MCTC), agrees that higher education plays an important role in ensuring that the US remains competitive internationally. MCTC initiatives and programs are designed to train entry-level workers for careers in technical trades and manufacturing.

"We are, as are all community colleges," Bollman says, "On the frontline of the state's economic situation and on the development of economic opportunities. Our single goal is to provide more graduates who are ready to work."

Scott Olson, the Interim Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs at MN State Colleges & Universities, says that he is excited to be a part of student innovations. "We act as a resource to employers and manufacturers because the number of young people who want these jobs is out there." He says that 80% of graduates stay and work in Minnesota.

When businesses off-shore jobs overseas and we fail to provide young people with the education they need, America's economy suffers. These are jobs where you are treated with respect and work as part of a team. It's time to 'Make it in America.'