

House Committee on Small Business
Presented by John D. Ratzenberger- May 12, 2016

This great country of ours, this land we call the United States of America was founded and nurtured on 2 basic guiding principles: Freedom and the Ability to use that freedom to build the finest civilization yet seen on earth.

We built this nation guided by our imaginations and the skills we learned from our elders. We cut our own timber with saws we made ourselves from the ore we mined using tools that we machined and honed on machines that we built from scratch with our own hands. We drew, measured and shaped the tools we needed to build our homes and the villages towns and cities in which we lived. We travelled from place to place in vehicles we built and maintained ourselves to harness the pulling power of the livestock given to our use and care. We used our own hands to build the barns, fences, and corrals that kept our animals protected so that we could feed our families with food we grew ourselves in fields plowed with more tools that we designed and proudly crafted.

We were always a nation of builders, tinkerers and craftsman that met each and every task and challenge with hands-on skills that were passed from generation to generation. We built our own ships that gave birth to the United States Navy. The same ships that fought the Barbary pirates off the coast of North Africa when Thomas Jefferson was President. We used the same time honored skills to construct the battleships and landing craft that were necessary for our victories on D-Day as we pushed the Nazi nightmare back and extinguished the flame of evil so that our children could live in peace. We made every one of the weapons carried by our brave men and women throughout our history to protect the place we call home.

With our own hands, we designed and constructed a rocket ship that landed us on the moon and launched the satellites that transmit our cell phone signals from one place to the next. We used our hands to construct medical equipment that have saved millions of lives worldwide. Make no mistake, we are the peacekeepers of the world because of our manufacturing might. Manufacturing is to America what spinach is to Popeye.

While future generations may have to explain that analogy, we in the year 2016 understand that without tinkerers, builders, and manufacturing throughout the land, we are rendered spineless and helpless. Manufacturing is the backbone of Western Civilization. Everything we do every single day is reliant first on someone's ability to not only put a nut and a bolt together but to make that nut and that bolt in the first place. I have always known these truths to be self evident because I grew up in the once mighty industrial town of Bridgeport Connecticut surrounded by people who knew how to design, make, build, fashion, repair and maintain anything you wanted. My uncles proudly boasted about their ability to hone a piece of metal down to 1/5000th of an inch tolerance as though the fate of western civilization rested on it. As a ten year old, I thought it was funny but as I got older and a tad more sophisticated, I realized that my uncles were right. The fate of Western

Civilization rests entirely on our ability to make things. The world would get along just fine without actors, reality stars, musicians and sports celebrities. Our loved ones would be sad but the world would continue to hum along seamlessly. Think, however, what would happen if all the skilled trades people from carpenters and plumbers to farmers and truck drivers decided not to show up for work tomorrow. We, the entire nation, would instantly grind to a halt causing problems that would take generations to overcome.

So why then have we stopped teaching our children the joys of crafting something out of nothing?

About fifteen years ago while visiting a number of factories and filming the different ways companies make things for my TV show "John Ratzenberger's Made in America", I realized that there were hardly any workers under the age of forty in any of the facilities. After talking with dozens of CEOs and plant foremen in every state, I was made aware of the fact that nationwide, the manual arts, that is: wood shop, metal shop, auto repair shop and even home economics were taken out of the middle and high school curriculums about 35 years ago. Not only did that result in a dropout rate back then of 30 percent instantly but it left us with a skilled essential workforce whose average age today is 58 years old.

There are close to a million jobs available right now in small businesses around the country that rely on people with mechanical common sense skills that we've stopped offering in our public schools 2 generations ago. The most repeated complaint today from potential employers is that it's impossible to train someone for any of the jobs available when they graduate from high schools everywhere without the ability to even read inches and fractions from a simple ruler.

The big worrisome question then is this... How do we reinstate the necessary programs in our schools to give our children a familiarity of the tools that built and maintain our civilization and way of life? If the average age of the people that keep our nation and the nation's infrastructure working is 58 years old then how long do we have before it all stops?

I also submit that we do away with the term "blue collar worker" and replace it with "essential worker" because that's exactly what they are. Once they are all retired then no more ships, buildings, trains, planes, or automobiles. No more tractors, no more farms, no more food unless we grow it ourselves in fields we plow with tools we've made with our own hands. That's the way it's always been and if we someday want to explore the universe, cure disease and marvel at what awaits us in the oceans depths then we'd better get busy introducing our youngsters to the vital art of using tools and the joy of self reliance. Thank you....

John Dezso Ratzenberger