

editor's note



ONE OF THE CONSTANT THEMES OF DONALD TRUMP'S PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN IS TO "MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN."

He points to a weakened military—especially the navy. (How weak is our navy? It currently has more aircraft carriers than the rest of the world combined. If it was an air force, it would rank #2 worldwide in the number of military aircraft.) And he points to a weakened manufacturing sector, with the steel industry as his poster child for a once-mighty industry now in decline. Along with his rivals in both parties, he tours Pennsylvania and Ohio and points to shuttered behemoths. Where once there was a roar of furnaces and billows of smoke, today there is silence.

But rather than a sign of a weakened America, the steel industry should be looked at as a crowning example of American exceptionalism.

America's steel industry hasn't declined and it hasn't disappeared. Rather, it's changed, evolved and become greater. Where Bethlehem Steel took 12 man-hours to produce a ton of steel in 1980, today Nucor produces a ton of stronger steel in less than 0.6 man-hours. Where we once boasted about 36-ksi steel, today we commonly specify 50-, 65- and even 100-ksi steels. Today, more than 90% of the wide-flange used in our buildings comes from the big three domestic manufacturers: Nucor-Yamato Steel, Gerdau and Steel Dynamics. They have major wide-flange mills in Blytheville, Ark., Columbia City, Ind., Petersburg, Va., and Midlothian, Texas.

And it's not just wide-flange. More than two-thirds of the HSS members used in our buildings comes from two major U.S.-based companies: Atlas Tube and Independence Tube. Arcelor-Mittal, Nucor and SSAB produce more than 700,000 tons of plate a year in the U.S. for use in our nation's bridges.

The 2,300 firms in the domestic steel industry (producers, fabricators, service centers and erectors) employ more than 160,000 highly skilled and well-compensated workers.

However, Trump is right about one thing. America's manufacturing sector—including the steel industry—is under attack, and the war is not being conducted fairly. Foreign governments blatantly engage in currency manipulation and unfair subsidies. In addition, most of the leading foreign steel exporters fail to follow the health, safety and environmental demands we correctly impose on our manufacturers.

As election season continues, our question shouldn't be how do we make America great again; instead we should be asking every candidate for every office what they'll do to keep America great. We should be asking what they'll do to strengthen our workforce, our educational system and our industrial base.

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