

## Casting your ballot for the manufacturing industry

STEVE SAWIN

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This year has brought some unpredictable election stories, and as the months tick closer to Election Day in November, voters will be focused on major issues of interest and concern. For the sake of our state's future economy, let's hope that manufacturing and its growth get attention from voters and candidates.

When deciding for whom to vote, whether for president or city council, we need to keep in mind a range of topics that will impact job growth in manufacturing in Central Massachusetts and beyond.

As Baby Boomers retire, they leave a gaping hole in the workforce, particularly for manufacturing. Over the next decade, nearly 3.5 million manufacturing jobs in the nation will likely need to be filled, a proportionate number here in the Worcester area and statewide. This high number is due to both the gap caused by Baby Boomers exiting the workforce, as well as anticipated growth in manufacturing. Finding new workers for the industry is challenging due a long-standing negative perception of manufacturing work environments. Manufacturing jobs were once seen as dirty, dangerous and physically demanding. But today's advanced medical device manufacturing facilities, for example, are high-tech clean rooms, making everything from cardiovascular stents to an artificial pancreas.

One avenue for bringing in new workers to the industry is to expose young people and their parents to career opportunities available. Supporting vocational schools is a very important step in increasing the availability of new workers into the industry. Vocational school graduates can fill the pipeline of potential workers if curriculum on manufacturing is integrated into their programs of study.

It takes a lot of effort and work to change the perception of manufacturing for the Millennial generation and younger generations to come. It will save hundreds of local manufacturing jobs from going overseas, if we can!

Another topic to keep in mind when voting for your chosen candidate is his or her plan for public transportation. A growing number of people are unemployed or underemployed due to the lack of available transportation to commute to and from work on a daily basis. Owning a car is expensive, so we need better public transportation options in order to move workers from where they live to where the jobs are.

According to the American Public Transportation Association, every \$1 invested in public transportation generates approximately \$4 in economic returns, and every \$1 billion invested in public transportation supports and creates more than 50,000 jobs.

Some communities are getting creative with their transportation solutions, such as pooling money from companies for shuttle buses to transfer employees from train or bus stations to the companies' job sites. If we want to keep the manufacturing industry growing in our region, we need our workforce to be able to easily commute to manufacturing facilities, which are not always close to commuter rail stations and bus stops.

Voters have limited time and focus, and there are other issues that can seem a priority. If we want to keep manufacturing a viable industry in Central Massachusetts, we need advocates at every level of government.

*Steve Sawin is the CEO of Clinton staffing provider Operon Resource Management.*