

Illinois Congressman Rallies Small Manufacturers at Conference

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Nov. 18--An Illinois Congressman issued a call to arms for small manufacturers Monday to oppose a tax bill that he says gives multinational corporations incentive to ship jobs overseas.

Rep. Donald **Manzullo**, R-Ill., told about 300 listeners at the keynote address of FABTECH International 2003 that the "American Jobs Creation Act of 2003" (HB 2896) will in fact destroy jobs and maybe their businesses.

"This bill grants tax breaks to overseas corporations to manufacture overseas and gives manufacturers here incentive to locate in China and other countries," **Manzullo** said.

He told his audience at FABTECH to get on their cell phones and register their protest. Then he said to follow up by asking their congressional representative to come out to the plant.

"There is a big difference between going to Washington and talking to a member of Congress and inviting someone to your shop ... to walk him or walk her through and say this is what manufacturing is all about," **Manzullo** said.

Manzullo knows the pain of the current economic downturn first-hand because his district in Northwest Illinois has been hammered by the manufacturing recession. The state has lost 22,000 manufacturing jobs since last year and Rockford's August unemployment rate was 8.2 percent.

The six-term Congressman has already lined up about 25 other Republicans to oppose HB 2896. Along with Democratic opposition, that has effectively kept the bill from reaching the floor of the House. **Manzullo** has sponsored alternative legislation to force a compromise on the bill.

As **Manzullo** spoke on the first floor of McCormick Place South, the sound of rapid-fire pounding could be heard every now and then from the exhibition space on the second floor. That's where the TRUMPF5000 with Sheetmaster was punching holes in steel faster than a lobbyist can slip a Congressman a campaign donation.

The TRUMPF exhibit was one of 675 at FABTECH 2003. The international exposition is held every two years, with a regional show in off years. It is sponsored by the Society of Manufacturing Engineers and The Fabricators and Manufacturers Association International. It is one of the premier international trade shows for metal formers and fabricators.

TRUMPF has been partnering with East Chicago's Robinson Steel since 1995 to pioneer new sheet metal processing and cutting techniques, according to Joe Lucas, TRUMPF executive sales manager.

Lucas said the 15,000-square-foot TRUMPF display was busy on Sunday and some sales had already been made. Fabricating machine makers are hoping new tax incentives on capital equipment will help manufacturers loosen their wallets after three years of drought, according to Lucas and others at the show.

Sales at the show are one gauge of the health of manufacturing.

The number of booths at the show was down about 20 percent from two years ago, when the last international show was held, according to cosponsor the Society of Manufacturing Engineers. But the society said attendance Sunday was on target to meet the total of 20,000 attracted two years ago.

Lucas and others were still playing it close to the vest on Monday, and wouldn't give out any specific numbers on sales. But the TRUMPF 5000 had a big "SOLD" sign on it and the company confirmed the price is about \$555,000. The TRUMPF exhibit was the largest at FABTECH. The company was using it to introduce several new laser cutting and etching products.

At the much more modest booth for Aeromet Industries, of Griffith, marketing director Mark Fleishman said all signs are spending on heavy equipment will bounce back.

The company has felt the pain of the recession. It has downsized from about 88 employees to 57, Fleishman said. But its emergency repair services still remain in demand at steel mills.

Fleishman said he hadn't heard Congressman **Manzullo's** talk; he preferred to concentrate on business.

"Realistically, a guy that's coming to this show, he's coming for a reason, and that's to get a problem solved," Fleishman said. "So you have to be here to talk to them."

A number of customers had already been by to see if Aeromet could help them with manufacturing problems at their plants. Fleishman said he expected more over the next three days.

The marketing director said those fabricating specialty metals like aluminum and stainless steel are starting to spend money on new machines.

But the flat carbon fabricators, which predominate in Northwest Indiana, still seem to be holding back. But that may soon change.

"A lot of these CEOs and heads of companies have just been sitting on their hands for two years," Fleishman said. "So I think there tactical plans and strategies will change and they'll have to release some cash and get on with things."
