



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

George Winner

Is There A Future for Manufacturing?

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Last week we received word about the creation of an exciting new organization that I'm hopeful will help pave a few roads on the way to an economic renewal across upstate New York. At the very least, it appears this organization will be a source of timely, thoughtful, vibrant, and worthwhile ideas and awareness.

This new organization is being called the "Manufacturing Research Institute of New York State." It's been established by the Syracuse-based Manufacturers Association of Central

New York (MACNY), which is the largest association of its kind in New York and one of the nation's oldest. MACNY represents approximately 350 businesses and 55,000 workers across 19 upstate counties.

According to MACNY, the new Institute “will conduct research and analysis to effectively determine how best to help sustain and grow the manufacturing sector in New York State, increase public awareness of the importance of manufacturing to New York State’s economic development, and allow manufacturing companies the necessary tools and information needed to better prepare them in locating and training a skilled workforce.”

MACNY President Randy Wolken said, “Our state’s manufacturing sector has long needed an in-state research institute dedicated to New York State manufacturing...In an increasingly competitive national and global market, it is critical our state have a dedicated resource to collect information and research that will assist in the long-term success of our state’s manufacturing community.”

Amen. And if the Institute’s inaugural study is any indication, it’s going to be an extremely valuable addition to any and every effort to get the upstate economy moving again.

The study, “[Twenty First Century Manufacturing: A Foundation of New York’s Economy](#),” offers this summary, “Although commonly envisioned as one sector, manufacturing includes a broad swath of activity that adds value to the economy. There are the businesses that, in one form or another, go back centuries: cutting and stitching of apparel, printing, or fabrication of metal products. Then there are the industries that are only a few decades old, such as computers and certain specialized machinery... Despite reduced employment counts, manufacturing remains a foundation of New York’s economy. Communities across Upstate are especially dependent on local factories, often for more than 25 percent of all private-sector payrolls. New York’s manufacturing sector is not as large proportionally as those in

most other states — yet its high rate of value added in production and high-paid jobs make it possible for the state to retain its position as a national industrial leader.”

The report provides an historical and modern perspective on manufacturing’s importance to regional economies statewide – especially, it’s important to note, in our own Southern Tier. It serves to raise the awareness of the key changes that this sector has undergone, but also stresses the relevant place it continues to offer for the future of upstate communities, workers and their families.

The study’s overriding importance, in my view, is twofold. One is that it very clearly sounds the alarm on the challenges ahead, and we can never have enough of that. But secondly, it’s a timely reminder that while the upstate manufacturing sector has undergone rapid change over the past two decades, it remains a crucial segment of the overall state economy and, most critical of all, a foundation on which to build a better, stronger future.

That’s a message that needs to begin resonating across New York government which, as so many of us have said time and time again, has a vital role to play in creating the kind of favorable economic climate in which manufacturing can be renewed and thrive again.

For too many decades now, upstate manufacturing has become synonymous with lost jobs, abandoned factories, and declining communities. While that’s been true in far too many once-proud upstate cities and towns, it’s a perception that’s not entirely accurate. I remain concerned that too many state legislators, particularly in this era of limited resources, might consider upstate manufacturing a lost cause.

That attitude has to change, and so I’m hopeful that upstate’s new Manufacturing Research Institute can help lead the way in changing it once and for all. It’s off to a good start.

