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Friday, 18 January 2013 15:54

What We Need

We begin 2013 with a number of challenges and opportunities. On one hand, some of the strongest headwinds we face are associated with government indecision (the debt ceiling, sequestration and wrangling over too many regulations vs. too few, for example). On the other hand, most of us are looking forward to what onshoring/reshoring trends and improving economic conditions could hold for our businesses and communities.

From *MT*'s perspective, one of our biggest challenges (and something we've covered extensively) involves the changing workforce— *and the thousands of industrial jobs going unfilled across our underemployed nation*. For whatever reason, the message that the manufacturing and process sectors offer great opportunities and career benefits seems to have been lost on much of our society. This sad fact was reinforced for me on Christmas Day, in a *New York Times* article by Jack Healy.

Entitled "Pay In Oil Fields Is Luring Youths In Montana,"* the article's premise is that the state's teenagers are selling themselves short by jumping off the college track to pursue good-paying trades and support-related jobs. It suggests that working "construction and repairing machinery," or "first [seeking] training as welders or mechanics" are not worthy goals. To sum it up, being an apprentice, as the author puts it, "alongside men old enough to be their fathers," is a risky choice for young people hoping to ensure meaningful futures.

I agree that higher education is important. But then, all education is important, be it via universities, trade schools, apprenticeships or—*if we're really lucky*—getting to work alongside our fathers, mothers and others of their generation.

Improving our industrial base is among the most noble of pursuits. If enough of our children heed that call, we all could be enjoying better lives (with fewer lawyers, fewer bankers, fewer indecisive politicians…). We need more proud, skilled men and women keeping our energy sources flowing, our power grid working, our water-treatment facilities functioning, our transportation systems running and our plants humming safely, cleanly, efficiently, reliably and profitably. **MT**

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Best Wishes for a Happy & Prosperous 2013!