



Next month, we cast our votes for President of the United States. The timing of this call to civic duty creates a good opportunity to remind the winning candidate that the hardworking industrial community has good ideas on how to address some big issues. We offered Panelists the chance to share their thoughts on several topics with the man who will occupy the Oval Office over the next four years. The only rule was that they focus on solutions, not politics. We promise to send a copy of this month's column to the winner of the November election. Here's what our Panelists said:

### ***The skilled-worker shortage...***

"The next administration needs to focus on promoting the skilled trades. If it can change the mindset of the public from believing that only a college degree will get you somewhere in life to believing that technical training in one of the skilled trades is as successful as a college degree, we may have a chance to turn around the lack of qualified people we have in the maintenance field."

*... Production Support Manager, Midwest*

"More emphasis needs to be put on vocational training and technical colleges. We are losing many skilled candidates in industry because few high schools encourage students to pursue careers there."

*... Senior Maintenance Mechanic, South*

"Enterprises are at fault for not developing their own qualified people. You will have more

## For On The Floor: Dear Mr. President

Written by Rick Carter, Executive Editor  
Thursday, 25 October 2012 11:45

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skilled people all the time if you care for your workforce and implement a culture of constant learning and practicing. What the government can do to encourage this atmosphere is to grant funds to companies that show their real efforts to increase the performance levels of their people... Stronger companies pay better taxes and while doing so, help the development of their communities.”

... *Reliability Consultant, Midwest*

### ***Reducing U.S. dependence on foreign oil...***

“We have to responsibly develop all the natural gas that has been discovered in our country. Government should encourage this by incentivizing an infrastructure to utilize this energy. It could easily provide America with the next big economic driver we need to produce good jobs.”

... *Senior Maintenance Mechanic, South*

“Most of the oil we use is for transportation, [but] our technologies have given us many different ways to motorize our population: sun, nuclear, magnetism, natural gas and gasses from trash. We have the technology, but do not use it. If the government said gasoline production would be cut 10% each year for the next five years, we would see monumental growth in new efficient fuel systems.”

... *Former Senior Maintenance Engineer, now a Teacher, West* □

“Tap the U.S. oil reserves in Alaska and off the East Coast. Get the coal industry fired back up and relax some of the over-burdening governmental regulations.”

... *Reliability/Maintenance Engineer, South*

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“While we should do all we can to recover oil and refine oil products from North America, I am concerned about the possible effects it could have on our environment. I feel that we should do all we can to provide sources of any and all forms of energy and lessen our dependence from out of the country. This would provide jobs due to both new construction and upgrades.”

... *PM Leader, Midwest*

### ***Strategies to ensure raw material availability ...***

“China is holding many nations at their mercy for supplying rare-earth magnets even though we have them here. We also have gold mines shut down in Alaska because the energy costs to operate them are too high. We have been using nuclear propulsion for decades, so let’s build and install small modular nuclear power plants in these remote areas.”

... *Maintenance Coordinator, East*

“Some raw materials and rare-earth minerals must come from other countries, but the United States has a very precious resource known as food. The new President should barter food for rare earths and other materials in order to ensure their continued flow.”

... *Reliability/Maintenance Engineer, South*

“One of the keys would be to cut back on the use of raw materials, [and] recycling is an excellent way to do this. Many countries have mandatory recycling programs. Just think of how much raw material usage can be reduced if we can recycle just 20% of our trash.”

... *Former Senior Maintenance Engineer, now a Teacher, West*

***Eliminating tax-related and other advantages for offshore operations...***

“I would like to see a change in the trade laws between advancing countries and the United States. It’s hard to compete when the playing field is tilted so badly.”

*... PM Leader, Midwest*

“Our government supports outsourcing with the North American Free Trade Agreement, [and] our tax laws [encourage it]. As a result, outsourcing is entrenched in most company’s business plans. How to solve: Innovations. Develop manufacturing practices in the U.S. that reduce costs and add jobs.”

*... Former Senior Maintenance Engineer, now a Teacher, West*

***Strategies to combat counterfeit parts...***

“Raise tariffs on countries that allow counterfeit parts to be shipped from their shores. If this is done, and a particular country’s legitimate manufacturing sector begins to suffer due to the increase, the guilty countries will be forced to deal with the counterfeiters themselves.”

*... Reliability/Maintenance Engineer, South*

“More inspections and stiff penalties are the only solutions I see for this.”

*... Senior Maintenance Mechanic, South*

### **Focus on ideas, do more, talk less** □

Several Panelists submitted detailed perspectives, including one who suggests that the country doesn't have an economic problem—*it has an idea problem*. “The U.S. was once known for its ability to solve all types of problems,” he observes. “Now we are down on the list of technology innovations, education, even a functioning government. We have become a ‘What’s in it for me?’ nation instead of a ‘What’s in it for us?’ nation.” His solution: “The country, as a whole, needs to set goals, develop ways we can reach these goals as a combined group. We are being robbed of the American Dream,” he says, “by the people we entrusted to ensure that dream.”

Others elaborated on the idea that problems created by the skilled-worker shortage—*considered today's top problem for industry*

—could be eradicated with a plan to rebuild the nation's infrastructure. “There is more than enough work if we truly want it and are not afraid to make decisions,” says one Panelist. “Adopt a high-speed rail policy and start building. The new plants needed to build cars and engines, and the building of the lines themselves, would create many high-paying jobs... Industries involved would mobilize to train and develop a new skilled workforce.” As he explains it, “We can do this, but we must force the politicians to stop talking and finally put pencil to paper.”

**MT**

*Have your comments and observations included in this column by joining our Panel. [Click here](#) and follow instructions. If accepted, you will automatically be entered into a drawing for a cash prize after one year of active participation. Panelist identities are not revealed, and their responses are not necessarily projectable.*