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## Made in America Panel Proposes that a Robust Infrastructure Program is Being Held Back by a Lack of Trained Workers

Host Neal Asbury, together with co-host Dr. Rich Roffman, opened their nationally syndicated "Neal Asbury's Made in America" show on Radio America (aired by almost 100 affiliates) by reiterating Neal and Dr. Roffman's optimism about the impact that tax reform will have on creating an amazing U.S. economy.

"Tax reform is a great achievement. Now I'd like to see immigration reform tackled to bring in qualified, skilled immigrants to fill thousands of open jobs. And finally see an Obamacare replacement," proposed Neal.

Dr. Roffman agreed, adding that a merit-based system will identify qualified workers to fill jobs that will spur our economy.

The first guest on Made in America was Kenneth D. Simonson, chief economist of the Associated General Contractors of America, who revealed that the contractor market has grown 3 percent over the past year – faster than most other industries. But it's getting harder to find skilled workers.

"We expect to see a strong rise in single family home construction, new manufacturing plants, power plants and pipelines. We need the skilled workers to be able to meet the demand," noted Simonson.

Dr. Roffman added that when large construction projects get underway, it elevates the local economy, and enriches suppliers and vendors.

Simonson calls this an "induced effect," since workers with more money in their pockets spend it locally on meals, housing, trucks, etc.

"We need to grow our pool of skilled U.S. construction workers by revitalizing technical and career schools and encourage more kids to think about these higher paying jobs instead of getting a college degree with no job in sight. But we also need to have the government help us bring in skilled immigrants," proposed Simonson.

Neal and Dr. Roffman segued to a discussion of Seattle's ill-advised sugared drink tax, which has not worked in Chicago or New York. Neal characterized this as yet another example of a "Nanny State."

Dr. Roffman agreed, noting that the 1.75% tax on sugared beverages is ridiculous, causing a case of Gatorade to soar to \$26.00 – nearly double its former price.

Neal moved on to a discussion of the \$11.00 per hour minimum wage recently announced by Walmart; to which Dr. Roffman challenged Democrats to explain why forcing companies to

raise minimum wages is better than companies voluntarily raising their wages.

"There are two million fewer Americans collecting food stamps – a real indication that people are finding jobs. And there was a Wall Street Journal story that predicted that more cars will be manufactured in right-to-work states than in Detroit," noted Neal.

Dr. Roffman reminded listeners of a 1986 film entitled "Gung Ho," which described what happened when a Japanese car company buys an American plant, the American liaison must mediate the clash of work attitudes between the foreign management and native labor.

"I think this foreshadowed what is happening today, where union-run plants in Detroit are losing market share to foreign car manufacturers who are building plants in right-to-work states and know how to make money and still pay good wages," suggested Dr. Roffman.

The segment ended with a discussion of the fact that both black and Hispanic unemployment levels are at the lowest in years.

The next guest on Made in America was Craig Stevens, the spokesperson for Grow America's Infrastructure Now, who proposed that as America's infrastructure is crumbling, there is a dramatic need to start funding infrastructure projects. As an example, some 56,000 bridges are deficient.

"There is a big opportunity to move forward on infrastructure funding, which I think will get bipartisan support. Although we might have to return to earmarking pet projects for some members of congress to get them on board," according to Stevens, who added that we can jumpstart these projects with private sector funding where projects are completed on time and on budget.

Stevens expects President Trump to include infrastructure funding during his State of the Union Address.

Along the same lines as the previous interview with Kenneth D. Simonson, there is an urgent need for skilled workers who can take on infrastructure positions.

Dr. Roffman shared a survey of construction firms, which found that 75 percent would like to add to their headcount, but 53 percent indicated that they couldn't find enough skilled workers.

Stevens maintained "It's really an indictment of our education system, which focuses on degrees instead of careers."

Neal agreed, adding that it is also an indictment of our immigration policy, which doesn't

do enough to bring in qualified and talented immigrants. Dr. Roffman added that the key is a merit-based immigration policy.

The other component of an effective infrastructure program is the ability to streamline projects and avoid the red tape that stalls or shuts down projects.

The show concluded with Neal recounting a session at the Housewares Association show, which revealed that the U.S. postal service is subsidizing foreign exporters with discounted postal rates that aren't afforded to U.S. manufacturers.

"China is really taking advantage of this loophole. Not only can they ship products to the U.S. more cheaply but aren't subject to the scrutiny that American products are under. This has led to rampant counterfeiting. Essentially, the U.S. postal service is helping China rip off American companies and consumers," maintained Neal, who would love to talk face-to-face with Trump and ask him to stop this practice.

Neal believes that Trump would take action. He understands how unfair trade practices are hurting America.

Each week Neal Asbury's Made in America provides Neal's insights into the week's top news stories and their impact on the worlds of entrepreneurship, small business ownership and the overall economy. Neal's analysis, together with co-host Dr. Richard Roffman, a veteran 30-year publisher with extensive domestic and international experience, takes a non-biased approach based on real life experience in business as an American manufacturer and exporter. Made in America airs nationally each Saturday from 7-8:00 PM on Radio America. Link to Made in America at <http://www.nealasburysmadeinamerica.com>.



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