



Date: May 15, 2013

“Women in Manufacturing”

Opening Statement of Senator Amy Klobuchar, Vice Chair of the Joint Economic Committee

As Prepared for Delivery

I want to thank everyone for being here this morning to have this important conversation on the role of women in manufacturing and to discuss ways women can play an even greater role in the future.

Today’s hearing will examine manufacturing’s impact on the economy, look at the challenges facing manufacturers and explore how – by increasing women’s participation in the sector – we can strengthen manufacturing and bolster our economy. This hearing will cover many of the same topics as the report I released yesterday on women in manufacturing.

I’d especially like to thank our distinguished panel of witnesses:

Ms. Jennifer McNelly is President of The Manufacturing Institute, the non-profit affiliate of the National Association of Manufacturers. She has led the development of the Manufacturing Skills Certification System, which certifies a set of nationally portable, industry-recognized manufacturing skills.

Ms. Darlene Miller is the President and CEO of Permac Industries in Burnsville, Minnesota. Permac is a precision machining company that custom-manufactures parts for customers around the globe in industries including aerospace, medical technology and transportation.

Mrs. Amy Jolley, is Vice President of Tax at Noble Energy, Incorporated, an exploration and production company with domestic and international operations. She is responsible for Noble’s global tax matters.

For decades, manufacturing has been a pathway to the middle class for millions of families – offering good wages, good benefits and a shot at home ownership.

Manufacturing remains central to the U.S. economy today, making up about one-eighth of GDP. And, manufacturing is a major driver of innovation, accounting for 70 percent of research and

development carried out by U.S. industry and generating 90 percent of patents. From the pacemaker and the post-it note in my state, to the hand-held calculator in Texas, to air conditioning in New York, to a "smart" polymer that introduces medicine into the bloodstream in Maryland, to the first nuclear submarine in Connecticut, manufacturing powers innovation across our country.

While manufacturing employment has rebounded during the past three years, there is a gap today between the skills employers want and the experience workers have. In a recent poll of manufacturing companies in my state, 60 percent of respondents said it was hard for them to find workers with the right skills and experience, up from 40 percent in 2010.

When I travel around Minnesota, I hear from too many companies that they want to grow, but can't fill open positions. They have vacancies for welders and tool and die makers. I cannot tell you how many managers of plants have told me that we just need someone who wants to learn these skills, or who has these skills.

That's a serious challenge right now, and it is likely to become an even bigger challenge: half of manufacturing workers are 45 years old or older, which means that looming retirements will increase the unfilled demand for skilled production workers.

There is an additional reason to get more women in manufacturing. As described in a Mother's Day report that I released last week, nearly half of mothers work full-time outside of the home and mothers are the sole breadwinner in more than one-third of families.

Manufacturing jobs pay well, helping women contribute more to their families' financial wellbeing.

Continuing to strengthen U.S. manufacturing is both an immediate and long-term priority for our nation, and tapping the talents and knowledge of women workers must be part of the solution.

Women are underrepresented in the manufacturing workforce — and are losing ground. Women's share of manufacturing employment has been falling steadily since 1990 and is now at its lowest level since 1971. Women make up just 27 percent of the manufacturing workforce.

While the manufacturing sector has added more than half a million jobs since February 2010, men have accounted for all of these gains. During this period, women actually lost 28,000 manufacturing jobs.

In order to change that — and in order to help manufacturers meet their hiring needs — we need to identify new ways for women to be exposed to, trained for and participate in future opportunities in manufacturing. Companies need the opportunity to better access the talents, expertise and experience of women workers.

Here are a few important steps we can take.

First, we must strengthen Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education. I have a bill

that would double the number of STEM schools and we must ensure that girls and young women are encouraged to take full advantage of these new opportunities. STEM skills are so important for today's technology-driven manufacturing jobs.

Closing the achievement gap in math and science will ensure that young women have the confidence and ability to pursue a degree or training in math, science and engineering.

We also need to do a better job of matching the skills taught in the classroom with the skills needed in the workforce.

Partnerships between employers and their local two- and four-year colleges can ensure that course offerings align with what's going on in the economy. These partnerships work: I've seen this in schools across Minnesota.

I think of the "Right Skills Now" program at Dunwoody College of Technology in Minneapolis, which is bringing local businesses to the table to better match course offerings with employer needs. One of our witnesses, Ms. Miller, is a founder of that program and I hope she will be telling us more about the program's successes.

The Manufacturing Institute's work to create nationally portable, industry-recognized manufacturing skills credentials can help us address the skills gap. Integrating trade-specific credentials, such as welding, into community college programs will help graduates get good-paying jobs, help employers find the workers they need and enable women to more fully participate in these occupations.

Part of the challenge in recruiting more women to manufacturing is that the perception of manufacturing hasn't caught up with today's reality. This is not your grandpa's factory floor anymore. Advanced manufacturing techniques are reshaping the sector. Sophisticated robots have joined the ranks of the wrench and hammer, and workers increasingly depend on math and engineering skills.

Yet, not enough young women think of manufacturing as a career path. High school girls should be exposed to manufacturing opportunities so they can pursue education or training that prepares them for a career in manufacturing.

Mentoring programs are great tools to expose girls and young women to manufacturing careers and can also help employers attract and retain women. They have been especially important in helping women rise in the ranks of leadership in the industry. When women work in industries where men have traditionally dominated the workforce, having a mentor to turn to for advice, support and guidance can boost satisfaction and retention.

Formal mentoring programs and informal networks are relatively inexpensive to create and can pay huge dividends down the road by helping women stay in the industry and achieve success.

Finally, I believe we need to be building an innovation agenda for America – a competitive agenda

that brings us back to brass tacks.

Manufacturing has always been at the heart of innovation in this country. America must be a country that makes stuff again, that invents things, that exports to the world, and to do that we need to do a better job of harnessing the skills and talents of women in the manufacturing industry.

I would like to recognize the leadership of Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney of New York on women's employment issues. I'll recognize Chairman Brady in a moment, but first I would like to yield a minute of my time to Congresswoman Maloney for her remarks.

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