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On a hot, sunny Saturday earlier this month, I joined several Navy and congressional leaders and thousands of enthusiastic onlookers at Subase New London in cheering not just the commissioning of our nation's newest attack submarine, the USS Missouri, but the reminder that "American-Made" is still the gold standard. Built in record time and with the most advanced technology available, the new submarine is a testament to the hard work and skill of the men and women of Electric Boat and the hundreds of small- and mid-sized manufacturing shops that comprise the submarine industrial base.

At a time when many doubt the future of "Made in America" manufacturing, the commissioning of the Missouri is proof positive that American-made manufacturing can produce a technological wonder that no other country can approach. We can also do it ahead of schedule and under budget.

Our nation's manufacturing sector has been hit hard by the economic downturn. Between 2001 and 2009 we lost 4.7 million manufacturing jobs — more than 27 percent of employment within this sector. More worrisome, 2.7 million manufacturing jobs were lost between June 2006 and December 2009.

Thankfully, this downward trend has slowly begun to reverse. This year, our economy added jobs for six consecutive months — including a total of 180,000 manufacturing jobs in the first seven months of 2010. These manufacturing employment gains comprise the longest stretch of manufacturing growth since 1997.

This is a good sign, but there is more work to do to bolster our manufacturing industry — particularly in Connecticut. That is why I am working to advance a "Make it in America" policy that closes tax loopholes for shipping jobs overseas, boosts incentives to create American clean energy jobs, and ensures that American firms can compete fairly for government contracts.

Recently, I visited the Manufacturing Technology Center at Asnuntuck Community College in Enfield. Over the past three years, I have worked with the college's officials to secure critical federal funding to expand their manufacturing program and acquire new equipment to ensure that students are on the cutting edge of manufacturing training. Students are receiving training in a diverse range of fields, including medical-device technology and alternate energy. The new certified welders, machinists, and technicians graduating from that intensive program are finding jobs in local firms desperate for trained workers.

For these students — and for the strength of our economy — it is critical that we continue to help grow our manufacturing sector and create jobs in Connecticut. American innovation and work ethic, like that seen in the USS Missouri and in countless manufacturing shops across our country, have long been the backbone of our economy. But the success of American manufacturing should not be just a proud part of our history; it should be a foundation of our economic future.

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