

# Planning for manufacturing's future

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State Summit participants discuss ways to rebound from recent setbacks in industry.

CONCORD - Manufacturing matters was the mantra of the New Hampshire Manufacturing Summit held Wednesday at the Grappone Conference Center.

The summit was the culmination of six regional roundtables over the past year during which manufacturing heads came together to talk about the issues facing their industry, such as skyrocketing health care insurance costs, financing difficulties and the need to have their voice heard in government.

And the summit was an opportunity for manufacturers to hear what recommendations had come out of the roundtables and what the future of manufacturing in New Hampshire might look like.

"Manufacturing is a critical component of the New Hampshire economy," said John Crosier, Business & Industry Association president. "Manufacturing is the economy's bedrock."

However, that bedrock has been shaken in recent years. The most recent recession hit manufacturing and high-tech particularly hard, with many jobs being eradicated or sent overseas.

Don Wainwright, chief executive officer of St. Louis-based Wainwright Industries and head of the new U.S. Manufacturing Council, a new group created by President Bush to help address problems facing manufacturers, continued the idea that what manufacturers do is an important activity.

"You are the wealth builders of the United States," Wainwright said, adding that it was important to get involved in lobbying and education efforts with politicians, the general public and students.

"We need to stand up and tell people what we need and why we need it," Wainwright said. "You have a voice in Washington with the Manufacturing Council." He said the U.S. Department of Commerce has also created an office of manufacturing that is charged with working with manufacturers.

"You have to get involved or you have no one to blame but yourselves," he said.

Manufacturers have been getting involved with the roundtables, and some recommendations gathered by these events will be considered a plan of action to helping manufacturing," said Stuart Arnett, director of N.H.'s Division of Economic Development.

The recommendations include working to develop worker training programs and skills, establishment of a federal Job Corps Center and more permanent apprenticeship and internship programs.

Others are special services, such as a single source for manufacturers to access information and a specific representative that they can contact for assistance. It is also recommended that a way for manufacturers to have a voice with legislators be developed, Arnett said.

The roundtables will continue throughout the state, and there will be ongoing special surveys of manufacturers and labor market monitoring of the health of the manufacturing survey, Arnett said.

Other recommendations include responses to the concerns raised by manufacturers, such as pooling of risks to reduce health insurance costs, sub-bank financing project, new international markets and more help making additional productivity gains.

The roundtables and the summit were a group effort by the Business & Industry Association of New Hampshire, the N.H. Division of Economic Development, the N.H. High Tech Council, the N.H. Manufacturing Extension Partnership, the Knowledge Institute, the N.H. Workforce Opportunity Council and the N.H. Small Business Development Center.

The 200 or so people in attendance also heard from Ross Gittell, a University of New Hampshire professor, who told the audience that in New Hampshire, the high-tech sector and manufacturing overlap quite a bit.

"Our futures are intimately linked together," Gittell said.

He said the focus on future manufacturing will have to be high-tech, low-volume design and prototype work, with mass manufacturing becoming a task that has gone overseas, where it will probably remain. Continuing innovation will be what drives both manufacturing and high-tech, he said, and additional money in research and development should aggressively encouraged. Also, relationships between companies and schools have to be better developed, he said.

"I'm optimistic about manufacturing and high-tech working together," he said.

Gov. Craig Benson said he is very confident about the state of manufacturing after touring at least 70 manufacturers, and finding companies that were constantly innovating, a characteristic necessary to thrive and succeed.

Dennis Delay, N.H. Workforce Opportunity Council economist and special projects director, agreed, saying "manufacturing is poised for a recovery."