



OPINION

# Letters:

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National Manufacturing Day was Oct. 7. I spent the day with the metals industry trade association, California Metals Coalition, at Amada America in Buena Park learning more about metal punch presses, laser cutting machines and sheet metal stamping machines. More importantly, I spoke with the workers and small business owners who compete in this global market.

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I heard from a California metal worker who contributed to the aluminum wheels used on the Mars Rover Curiosity. I learned from a California metal company who utilizes 3D printing prototypes to design and manufacturer automotive parts for Tesla. And numerous California metal companies enlightened me on the metal instruments they are producing for advanced medical research.

But even more impressive than space travel, 3D printing, electric cars and medical advances were the middle-class workers supported by California metal manufacturers.

For California's metalworking industry, eight of 10 workers are ethnic minorities or reside in impoverished regions or low-income communities. This demographic has been hit the hardest with California's loss of middle-class job opportunities and struggles with a service economy that offers minimum wage, little or no health care, and weak retirement options.

So when I listen to workers from my district making \$45,000-\$70,000 a year in metal manufacturing, I get encouraged. But to learn that several achieved this with only a high school diploma, I then worry how many of these good job opportunities are truly left.

Good pay and benefits are not just for those with a university degree. California must make sure this opportunity is available to everyone in our state, especially those who reside in our communities of concern.

But these trees of opportunity only bear fruit in the fields of manufacturing. And unfortunately, California has not been proactive in protecting these trees.

Orange County may have recovered the jobs we lost during the recession, and unemployment in the state is around 5.5 percent. But losing \$25-\$30 an hour manufacturing jobs, and replacing them with \$10-\$15 per hour service jobs is not progress. Government statisticians may tally these jobs as being equal, but ask a parent with small children what the loss of a middle-class manufacturing wage means to their family.

The rungs on the economic ladder are spreading farther apart. The rise of inequality on California's working middle-class is a major societal problem. But the antidote for this crisis is not a mystery. It was crystal clear on National Manufacturing Day.

— **Ling-Ling Chang, Diamond Bar, Assemblywoman, District 55**