**Headline:** Why It’s Essential for America to Own Supply Chains

By David McCall

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**[Article Body:]**

A knot formed in Sam Phillips’s stomach a few months ago when he learned that corroded titanium—sold with faked documents—somehow made it into doors and other components on civilian airliners.

It was exactly the kind of nightmare scenario that Phillips and other members of the United Steelworkers (USW) warned of while trying to save the nation’s last titanium sponge plant, located in Henderson, Nevada.

TIMET, the owner of the plant, closed it anyway in 2020, not only leaving America [dependent on foreign supplies](https://www.usw.org/news/media-center/releases/2020/usw-seeks-intervention-to-save-titanium-sponge-plant-citing-national-security-defense-concerns) of a crucial industrial material but also putting the [nation’s security](https://www.reviewjournal.com/local/henderson/henderson-timet-plant-workers-seeking-federal-help-to-prevent-closure-2087819/) at risk.

Only domestic ownership of manufacturing supply chains—from the sourcing of raw materials like titanium sponge to the production of goods like airplane components—will keep the nation strong.

Fortunately, the Biden-Harris administration grasped what’s at stake and delivered historic legislation like the [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)](https://www.npr.org/2021/11/15/1055841358/biden-signs-1t-bipartisan-infrastructure-bill-into-law) and the [Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/08/16/statement-from-vice-president-kamala-harris-on-the-inflation-reduction-act-anniversary/) to revitalize the nation’s manufacturing economy and preserve America’s freedom.

It’s essential for Americans to own supply chains across all industries, Phillips said, noting foreign companies can cut off shipments of goods at any time and for any reason.

Even manufacturers in ostensibly friendly countries like Japan can encounter production delays or shift operations, affecting U.S. access to needed goods. Just as worrisome, as the airliner titanium scare shows, the long decline of domestic manufacturing capacity even left Americans at the mercy of rogue, corner-cutting producers operating in the shadows thousands of miles away.

“How did it get manufactured and actually put in a plane?” asked [Phillips](https://m.usw.org/blog/2021/keeping-america-free), former president of USW Local 4856.

“It doesn’t make me want to get on airplanes anytime soon,” added Phillips, who learned about the debacle while reading a New York Times article in June. “They should have U.S. titanium in them.”

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) began an investigation after a parts supplier discovered holes, caused by corrosion, in airplane components made with titanium believed to have come from a Chinese company.

Adding to the uncertainty, authorities discovered that the Chinese firm falsified documents relating to the material it provided. The Times reported that the FAA was “investigating the scope of the problem and trying to determine the short- and long-term safety implications to planes” containing the suspect material.

It’s the kind of turmoil that’s easily avoided when union workers at U.S.-owned firms produce goods right here at home, said Phillips, emphasizing the trust he and his hundreds of co-workers built with TIMET customers over the years.

“They relied on us to give them a good, decent product,” Phillips said, observing that the plant supplied numerous civilian industries and the [armed forces](https://www.timet.com/assets/local/documents/petition/Titanium-Sponge-232-Petition-Summary.pdf) while providing middle-class livelihoods for generations of Henderson residents.

“I made a good living for 24 years,” explained Phillips, who now works in the logistics field. “I didn’t have to worry about paying my bills or putting food on the table. It was a good union job. The union took care of its members.”

Before closing the plant, TIMET cited dumping and other unfair competition from some of the same countries that, ironically, gamed greater market opportunities and [tightened their grip](https://www.timet.com/assets/local/documents/petition/Titanium-Sponge-232-Petition-09-27-2018.pdf) on the U.S. when the Henderson facility shut down.

Phillips, who tells his story to help others understand the danger of letting foreign companies seize control of U.S. supply chains, described shortages of face masks at the start of the pandemic and of [semiconductors](https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/biden-administration-coordinate-semiconductor-funding-effort-stave-off/story?id=101613721) a couple of years after that as further proof of the need to bolster U.S.-owned manufacturing.

That’s what’s happening right now as President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris work with the USW and other unions to advance a new era of manufacturing power.

Those efforts include fighting foreign takeovers of essential American firms and standing up to [trade cheaters](https://www.tribtoday.com/opinion/guest-columnists/2024/09/shipbuilding-essential-to-us/) that undercut U.S. producers and put jobs at risk.

They include leveraging the job creation, “Buy American” requirements, and manufacturing investments spurred by the IIJA, IRA, and the [CHIPS](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/08/09/fact-sheet-chips-and-science-act-will-lower-costs-create-jobs-strengthen-supply-chains-and-counter-china/) and Science Act.

Among many other important projects, for example, the IIJA and IRA allocate up to $500 million to help Century Aluminum construct a new energy- and cost-efficient [aluminum smelter](https://www.energy.gov/oced/industrial-demonstrations-program-selections-award-negotiations-aluminum-and-metals#greenal) in Kentucky or in another location in the Ohio River or Mississippi River basins.

It will be the nation’s first new aluminum smelter in 45 years and will create 1,000 permanent union jobs, along with hundreds of construction jobs.

And it represents a critical step forward for the aluminum industry, which fills a vital role in economic and national security but has experienced a spate of smelter closures over the years because of high energy costs and other challenges. Today, only a [handful remain](https://www.fastmarkets.com/insights/smelter-closure-to-wipe-nearly-30-of-us-aluminum-capacity/) in operation in the U.S.

“They keep it open for a reason,” said Todd Manning, president of USW Local 420A, citing the strategic importance of Alcoa’s aluminum smelting operations in Massena, New York.

The world’s oldest continuously operating smelter, it’s a bedrock of American industry serving both civilian and defense needs. And like the new Century Aluminum smelter, to be operated with renewable energy, the Massena smelter benefits from an affordable, accessible energy source—hydropower.

That’s helped to keep the facility open, said Manning, who looks forward to the stability the Century smelter will bring to American industry and the decreasing reliance on foreign producers.

“It’s very important not to have to deal with any of them,” Manning said, instead supporting the higher-quality, more reliable work performed by America’s union workers. “We need to be able to write our own checks.”