
ATMI No More, But Chestnutt Battles On

When Jim Chestnutt ended his tenure as president of the American Textile Manufacturers Institute (ATMI), the organization itself shut down.

There is no ATMI. But the textiles industry still has a fiery spokesman in Chestnutt, president and CEO of National Spinning, who spoke recently at the luncheon meeting for the Carolina Hosiery Association.

But National Spinning, too, is participating in the global trends. It recently opened a sweater knitting division in El Salvador while laying off hundreds of employees in Washington NC.

Chestnutt, however, sees danger on the horizon for U.S. manufacturers. "Since President Bush has assumed office, one textile job has been lost every nine minutes... and one manufacturing job is lost every 30 seconds," he observes.

The economy has two sides -- production and consumption, he continues. For the consumption aspect, every country in the world wants access to the U.S. market, he continued, but these countries are not willing to give U.S. producers equal access to their markets.

Example: the tariff for goods sent to China is 55 percent; the U.S. tariff on imports from China is 8 percent. "We put trade laws in effect, but we don't enforce them," Chestnutt alleged.

The 80-plus manufacturers and suppliers at the luncheon were challenged to become active in the campaign to save U.S. manufacturing. Among suggestions:

-- Become aggressive in challenging the trade policies of the government.

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-- Seek out and support politicians with backbone to stand up to retailers and others who are pushing for more cheaper goods from off-shore sources.

-- Educate your employees and register them to vote.

"You don't have to throw all the bums out. There are good people in Congress... and some who forget about the people back home."

"Can we make a difference? I don't know. But if we don't do anything, they (the free trade proponents) will run rough-shod over us," Chestnutt asserted.

Chestnutt touted the candidacy of George Moretz, Carolina Mills Inc. chairman, who is running for the 10th Congressional District seat. A resident of Hickory, Moretz is seeking to replace Cass Ballenger who is not seeking re-election.

Moretz has campaigned to save U.S. manufacturing jobs, while pledging to "help President Bush restore the American economy."

With the demise of ATMI, a new organization has emerged -- the National Council of Textile Organizations. The council's sole mission will be to influence legislation on Capitol Hill.