

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Helping Our Manufacturers**

By Representative Mike Michaud

Manufacturing continues to be important to this country's economy, representing one-eighth of our gross domestic product in 2005. At the same time, the challenges to remain competitive are increasing. Since 2000, the U.S. trade deficit has increased by a minimum of \$331 billion, or 43 percent.

My colleagues and I in Congress have maintained strong and continued support for a program called the Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) and have urged significant funding increases for it. MEP is the only federal program dedicated to providing technical support and services to small and medium sized manufacturers. MEP also has a nationwide network of proven resources that help manufacturers compete globally, support greater supply chain integration, and provide access to information, training and technologies that improve efficiency, productivity, and profitability.

The well-documented national impact of the MEP program is substantial. Based on services provided in FY 2006, MEP helped to create or retain over 52,500 jobs, generate more than \$6.765 billion in sales, and stimulate more than \$1.65 billion in economic growth.

Local results in Maine are also very impressive. According to an independent survey, Maine MEP clients, between 2003 and 2007, created or retained 2,171 jobs that otherwise would not have existed, increased and retained \$164.9 million in sales, spent \$49.3 million on new investment, and experienced \$31.4 million in cost savings.

With statistics like these, you'd think that everyone in Washington would be supportive of the program. Unfortunately, the President's 2009 budget essentially eliminates the MEP, cutting funding by \$87 million below the level needed to maintain current services and providing only \$4 million for 2009. These cuts came despite a letter to the Administration that I sent with a bipartisan coalition supporting MEP, and despite the fact that the President supported and signed into law the America Competes Act, a bill which authorized \$122 million in funding for the MEP.

As our economy slows, we should not be cutting funding to programs that create jobs. In fact, we need to be doing everything we can to create and sustain jobs, especially in the manufacturing sector. This is not a cut that would be good for Maine, especially given recent layoffs and plant closures.

Now that the President's budget has been submitted, it is important to let our colleagues on the Appropriations Committee know the importance of MEP. That's why I joined with fellow MEP supporters to send a letter to the Appropriations Committee advocating that they fully fund the program at \$122 million. This funding level is necessary for MEP to ensure the sustainability and growth of our domestic small manufacturing industry and high-quality, high-paying jobs.

Fully funding MEP is a wise investment that yields high returns and helps U.S. manufacturers improve their productivity and compete successfully in the global marketplace. It is something that we should be fully funding, not cutting.