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Metro Final

Paving right path is key to Michigan's recovery



Mackinac Island -- Next time someone tells you manufacturing is dead in America, remember two words — not true.

Next time someone claims you can't build world-class auto parts in Detroit with union labor, point to Dick Dauch's American Axle & Manufacturing Holdings Inc. It turned the collapse of 2008 and '09 into a tempering event that "we needed," he said Thursday at the Detroit Regional Chamber's Mackinac Policy Conference, "and the state of Michigan badly needed."

They build momentum. Momentum creates enthusiasm, witness pathbreakers like Tim Bryan of GalaxE Solutions sporting "Outsource to Detroit" T-shirts and insisting that the numbers work for rival information technology shops to land in downtown Detroit and capitalize on the cheap commercial real estate and plentiful engineering talent.

The point here is direction as much as speed. However skeptical a broader Michigan may be about the wisdom of Team Snyder's agenda and its likelihood of bringing meaningful economic change, there's a sense among business and political leaders here that forward motion is far better than no motion at all.

The second point: The industry that defined Michigan and whose fortunes still fuel so much of its economic life mostly survived near apocalypse. Its companies are smaller, leaner and more wary; they're more cautious, more globally diversified and more profitable, even amid lower industry volumes.

Finally, they have a lesson to teach: As dire as Michigan's predicament may feel and as grim as the outlook may seem, a path out can be paved by leaders rallying their people, not waiting for someone else to do it for them. And that's the most important lesson of all.

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