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With almost 1 in 10 Americans out of work, the need for immediate job growth cannot be overstated. What's ironic is that with all the talk about jobs and recovery, not a whole lot is being said about the record number of jobs still going overseas.

Right now, more than 20 million people can't find full-time work, and nationwide job growth remains anemic while most other economic indicators keep falling far short of expectations. America definitely has seen its share of good times and bad times, but today's economy, while sure to bounce back, is struggling to gain momentum.

Of all the sectors of the economy, one of the hardest hit has been domestic manufacturing - an industry segment that began its decline even before the current downturn. The enticements of free trade and imbalanced trade practices, essentially putting foreign interests above our own, have been a major contributing factor to the outsourcing of American jobs and lagging economic recovery.

Between 1980 and 2009, the U.S. has lost about 38 percent of its manufacturing base, according to the Brookings Institution. The biggest benefactor of this steady decline in America's work force has been China, which, in the process, has gained considerable influence over the U.S. economy.

In just the past decade, more than 1.5 million manufacturing jobs have gone to China alone. The Chinese government is also the single largest holder of U.S. debt and continues showing unrelenting interest in investing in - and gaining control over - the national economy. So what's being done about all this?

Not a thing.

Putting an end to such excessive outsourcing and bringing back many of the jobs lost over the

past 10 years would do the economy some good, but that's not what's happening. Instead, calls for free-trade deals with countries such as South Korea and Panama are growing louder as Americans watch more jobs being shipped to other countries.

The signs are all around. Take the new San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, for instance. Fabrication of major sections of the bridge is taking place not in the U.S., but in China. The reason: It was said American manufacturers lack the capacity to fabricate large steel structures.

That's incredibly hard to believe. We can build aircraft carriers and ships of all types. We can undertake massive infrastructure projects and build roadways that connect every corner of the country. There should be no doubt about our ability to build basic structural components for a bridge.

Not surprisingly, reports say U.S. fabricators do have the capacity. So, of course, the rationale for the decision changed. The new reason: U.S. fabricators could not guarantee an early completion date and priced the job too high, compared to the Chinese bid of \$400 million less.

For all the promises, the first delivery of Chinese steel was a year late, and the whole project is \$5.2 billion over budget and three years behind schedule. Even so, the Chinese are still on the project, consuming as many as 2,500 jobs that should be provided to U.S. workers.

There's also a national security component to outsourcing. The knowledge and skill sets needed to build the systems of the future, an area in which the U.S. has always been a leader, are shifting to foreign countries. For a while, items such as aircraft components and naval hardware were being made overseas. Now foreign dominance is extending to new frontiers, including space and cyber warfare.

The latest case in point involves Chinese-made components under use by a U.S. supercomputer laboratory engaged in classified military research, simulated flight testing and submarine warfare. The agreement providing these components is under review by regulators, but the use of these resources in a national security function underscores the extent of our nation's reliance on foreign made technology.

Plenty of other countries are in the mix, too.

Sikorsky Aircraft Corp., one of America's most reputable aircraft manufacturers, is building some of its Blackhawk helicopters in Poland - helicopters that could be made in the U.S.

There's also the cross-border trucking program authorized under the North American Free Trade Agreement, now in its final planning stage. Soon Mexican trucks will have unrestricted access to U.S. roadways, hauling cargo beyond commercial border zones - once a job for U.S. truckers. Not only will the program result in more lost jobs to Mexico, it's another mark on an already long list of security challenges for law enforcement.

Each of these examples illustrates the simple fact that American jobs, in addition to our economic and national security, are needlessly put at risk by our nation's trade practices and obvious penchant for outsourcing. Especially during one of the toughest economic times for many families, the idea that jobs are still being shipped overseas when factories and plants all across the country are closing their doors is both illogical and offensive. Worse, it continues undercutting any chance at sustainable recovery in the near future.

To be fair, corporations aren't necessarily at fault. The incentives they're offered overseas are often too good to pass up, particularly when it comes to their bottom line. So the solution starts with making trade agreements fair for U.S. manufacturers. Free trade has never been fair trade, and a leveling of the playing field is long overdue, which starts with reforms to the tax code, protection against currency manipulation and other incentives to promote domestic manufacturing.

Turning back the dial on the onslaught of jobs going to other countries is a prudent and necessary step toward putting people back to work. It's time that we put American workers first again - and keeping jobs here instead of sending them away is the way to make it happen.