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Industry, labor team up

By Dave Roche

This summer, many members of Congress held district meetings that were dominated by disagreement and confrontation. Here in Connecticut, however, Senator Richard Blumenthal participated in an event that showed what we can accomplish when two important constituencies focus on working together.

The event was a tour of the training facility at my union, Sheet Metal Workers Local 40 in Rocky Hill. The two groups were Connecticut's pharmaceutical companies and the building trades unions that represent the workers who construct and maintain the facilities for this important industry.

In fact, we're so dedicated to this partnership that we've formed the Pharmaceutical Industry Labor-Management Association -- or PILMA -- to ensure a long-term dialog about pro-growth policies, job creation and medical innovation.

From the union standpoint, the results are real. Pharmaceutical companies are among the last employers in the manufacturing sector that still maintain a significant footprint here in the United States.

What's more, it's an industry that is driven by innovation, as companies race to

find the next life-saving medication. New discoveries mean new construction and renovation, which puts our members to work. In 2008 alone, more than 47,000 jobs in Connecticut were directly or indirectly supported by the life sciences sector.

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Not to mention the estimated \$2.8 trillion a year in economic gains that University of Chicago economists attribute to increases in life span from medical innovation. As people have to work longer before retirement, medical advances that mean living longer and living better are increasingly essential.

At the same time, this partnership benefits the industry. Nationally, building

trades unions spend over \$800 million every year -- none of it taxpayer funded -- to train and certify our members to meet the high construction standards necessary for medical research and manufacturing.

This investment in our members means that pharmaceutical companies have a ready pool of highly skilled workers to build and maintain the laboratories, clean rooms and other specialized facilities they need.

And thanks to leaders like Senator Blumenthal, we've had real success in Congress, as well. Earlier this year PILMA worked with Blumenthal to win the Senate's passage of the America Invents Act, which will help our pharmaceutical industry remain competitive by encouraging medical innovation. That's why we were so pleased that Senator Blumenthal could join us at Local 40's training center last week, to see first-hand how his leadership in Washington benefits employers and workers here in Connecticut.

Dave Roche is president of Sheet Metal Workers International Association Local 40, which is based in Rocky Hill, Conn.