



The Daily Dish

A Tariff Triumph?

DOUGLAS HOLTZ-EAKIN | SEPTEMBER 29, 2026

The Wall Street Journal [scooped](#) the president's announcement of a new steel mill in eastern Iowa.

President Trump will announce a Minnesota company's plan to build a \$15 billion steel mill in Iowa, as he looks to counter voter frustration with the economy ahead of the midterm elections.

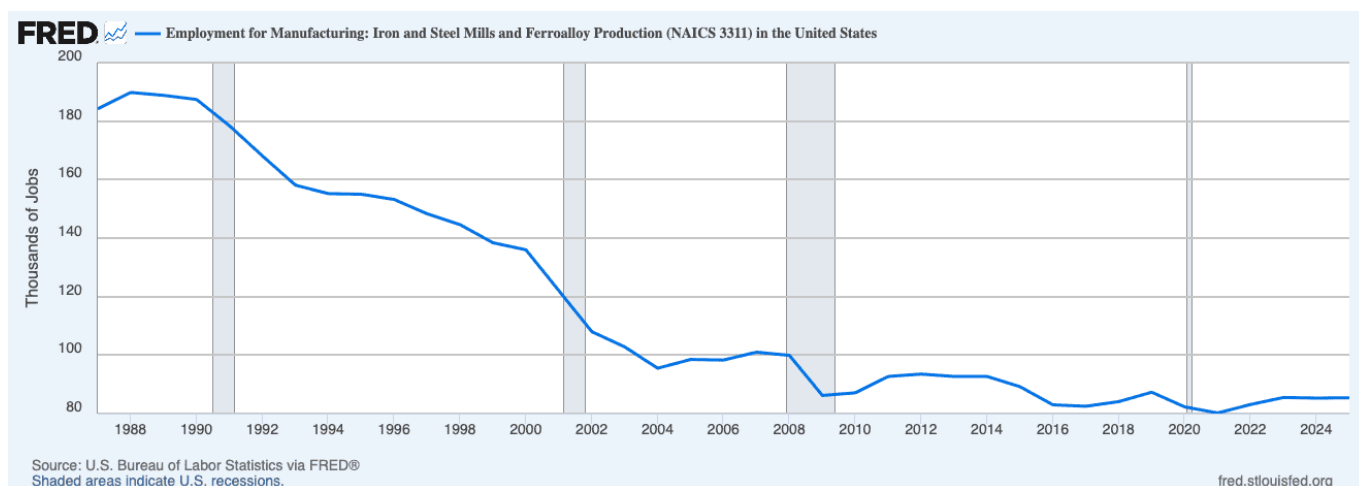
Of course, this is also an occasion for the president to tout the supposed success of his steel tariffs, which were first imposed in 2017, kept in place by President Biden, and raised after the election of President Trump to a second term. The article quotes supporters making exactly this case:

[S]teel-industry trade groups credit the duties with more than \$40 billion in investments in domestic steel production that have created thousands of additional jobs.

"Weakening the tariffs now would put that progress at risk," the groups said in a letter to Trump on Friday. "Tariffs have proven to be sound, effective trade policy."

Oh really?

The chart (below) shows employment in iron and steel production since the late 1980s. Obviously, employment has dropped dramatically. Was there a boom after steel tariffs by President George W. Bush in 2002? No. Was there a boom anywhere between 2017 and the present? No. The notion that tariffs have resurrected U.S. steel jobs and production is a fantasy.



What it *has* done is make the United States the most expensive steel market on the globe, with imports bearing the border tax and domestic producers therefore able to raise prices without fear of being undercut. Are high steel prices good for manufacturers? No. The only boom being experienced by manufacturing is driven by artificial intelligence infrastructure. The tariffs have only gotten in the way.

It is time to stop treating the outcome of tariff policy as a hypothetical. The experiment was run in 2001 and failed. It was re-run on a grand scale since 2017 and failed. It is not good economic policy. And in a month it will prove to be poor politics as well.