

Amanda Brucculeri

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Coverage of "The China Challenge"

In a compelling talk held at the headquarters of Harvard University's conservative publication, The Salient, Reps. Jake Auchincloss (D-MA-4) and Ro Khanna (D-CA-17) discussed their ideas about the future of Chinese-American relations and their potential impacts on the economy.

"I think that the way the economic relationship was structured was unbalanced, and that there has to be a rebalancing of that economic relationship," Khanna said in regards to the relationship between China and America's industries.

"My argument, though, in terms of the manufacturing hollowing out, is that we are not going to tariff or protectionize our way towards manufacturing greatness," Auchincloss said, agreeing with Khanna's opinion on the steps that need to be taken to revitalize the American economy.

Both Khanna and Auchincloss are members of the U.S. House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, which Auchincloss described as having two goals: to promote awareness within the Chamber of Congress about the threat from the Chinese Communist Party, as well as create agreement about specific policies that will promote competition in the economy.

The conversation was moderated by Julius Krein, a conservative political writer and the editor and founder of American Affairs, a quarterly political journal.

“Much of the conversation today is export controls, threats to Taiwan, what China is doing in the Global South, increasingly things like Tik Tok, Beijing's turn away from political liberalization,” Krein said, comparing current discussions about China with those of 20 years ago.

Auchincloss argued that in order for there to be an industrial revolution in America, there needs to be significant changes in the education of our youth.

“Priority 1 A is making sure every third grader is proficient at grade level for mathematics in this country. Everything else frankly, is a footnote to that imperative,” Auchincloss said.

Khanna agreed with Auchincloss’ emphasis on improving education, adding that 60% of Americans don’t have a college degree, which presents a problem as modern industrialization jobs require employees with a college degree or more.

“And I think we have to... figure out both a better credentialing path for those who don't have a diploma and say, ‘Look, getting more education of any kind is an important thing for building advanced manufacturing in this country,’” Khanna said.

Wenting Jia, a business owner who is originally from China, felt that one of the main problems with America’s economy is the overload of nonprofits, which she believes drives up the cost for entrepreneurs to start “smart manufacturing” in America.

“America is never going to be a labor intensive manufacturer, like where I come from, which is China. And we need smart manufacturing here,” Jia said.

Jia also mentioned the representatives’ concerns with the impact of the American education system on industries and the economy, and noticed the lack of education specifically in math when coming to America.

“I think that if the government focused on improving the skills of students, like in basic math, then we could excel in manufacturing,” Jia said.

When asked what can be done by research organizations and scholars to help the goals of the committee, Khanna and Auchincloss concurred that this area of policy making is very “fluid,” making it more likely to sway the public’s opinion than with other more controversial issues, like healthcare.

“I think that this is an area where doing creative, thoughtful work will get noticed, as opposed to other places,” Khanna said.

Auchincloss emphasized that the future of the industry is unknown, and that the most important industries to build in are constantly evolving.

“What we do know is that we need really smart, well-educated people with strong rule of law and quality infrastructure. If we can do those things well, 1000 flowers will bloom,” Auchinloss said.