



**Thayer Long**

# When Searching for the Truth, Look at the Facts

In today's world where information comes at you from every direction sometimes at lightning speed, and everyone has their own spin, it can be difficult to discern reality.

The current economic and political climate is extremely unstable. This environment has a way of fostering uncertainty and anxiety. Sometimes these fears are well-founded, but more often than not, the truth is never as extreme as some would have you believe.

Ignoring the noise around you is particularly challenging for those of us in the manufactured housing industry. We are ten years into a protracted decline, and the number of obstacles hindering our survival and growth at times seems merciless.

Indeed, especially when politics and law are involved, potential impacts easily become subject to a variety of interpretation, facts can easily be twisted and turned depending on your point of view, and even unfounded rumors begin to circulate, making it even more difficult to figure out how to tell up from down.

Before we resign ourselves to a doomed fate, let's consider the facts:

Fact: The manufactured housing industry unquestionably operates on an unlevel playing field relative to the rest of the housing market. This is an unfortunate truth which has plagued the industry for decades. Whether it is financing, our image, zoning, licensing, it seems that the manufactured housing has always had to do more with less.

Fact: The manufactured housing industry is not alone in our recent struggles. We have been in a slow, protracted decline. However, the site-built housing industry suffered a sharper decline dropping by over 70% in four years. The regulatory burdens are astronomical compared to just a few short years ago. No one in the housing or financial services world has remained unscathed. There have been no winners.

Fact: The manufactured housing industry does have an established seat at the housing table, and it is going to get bigger. Congress and many friends in Washington, DC do realize the important role we play. The manufactured housing industry is a highly respected industry with a strong voice in Washington, DC and around the country in state capitals. The manufactured housing industry, (both MHI and MHARR) enjoys relationships with key decision makers every day, and we are making a positive difference. There are over 80 members of the Manufactured Housing Caucus, and a strong and effective MHI-PAC. At the time of this writing, MHI was one of just 70 organizations and companies in the entire housing sector invited to attend and participate in the "Conference on the Future of Housing Finance" hosted by Treasury Secretary Geithner and HUD Secretary Donovan to provide input on the role of government in housing.

Fact: Despite some honorable differences from time to time, the two national associations, MHI and MHARR, are united on common ground to protect and promote the manufactured housing industry at

every level. Like every industry, we do not always see eye-to-eye with our regulators. While playing extremely important and significant roles, Congress and the Federal government is not the cause of, nor the solution to, all of our problems.

Fact: Some people just don't like manufactured housing. The again, some people don't like the housing industry in general, and some people don't like mortgage industry. Many don't trust Wall Street, and some don't have faith in Main Street. Some of these people may be in the government sector, and some may be in the private sector. It's a big world. This isn't an apology for our detractors, but we can't please everyone. But, if we do the right thing and keep our customers satisfied, we have done what we needed to do.

Fact: There is no government conspiracy to put the manufactured housing industry out of business. The manufactured housing industry provides tens of thousands of U. S. jobs. 18 million people reside in our homes, and since 1989 we have accounted for 21 percent of the single family housing market. Consumers desire to live in our homes and in our land-lease communities. At the Administration's conference on the future of housing finance mentioned earlier in this article, I can assure you, there were no policymakers or elected officials present that want to see jobs lost and 20 percent of the housing market not be successful. The manufactured housing industry did not contribute to the housing crisis or financial meltdown of the past two years.

Fact: The manufactured housing industry is comprised of professional and decent Americans. Manufactured home retailers need more licenses than site-builders. Do you realize in some states a home builder doesn't have to get any type of license to build a house? A majority of communities are owned and managed with either professional staff, or courteous, decent, and well-intended managers and owners. Manufactured homes are built to a stringent federal building code with a high frequency of inspections. Manufactured housing is often on the cutting edge of technology and innovation.

We have to cope each and every day with disadvantages that harm what we do and turn them into opportunities. Today, all businesses and industries are under the regulatory microscope. This industry will persevere because it serves a critical need in this country – quality affordable housing – and that's a fact!

---

*Thayer Long is Executive Vice President of MHI, the preeminent national trade association for manufactured and modular housing industries, representing all segments of the industries before Congress and the Federal government. From its Washington, D.C. area headquarters, MHI actively works to promote fair laws and regulation for all MHI members and the industry. For more information on MHI, visit [www.manufacturedhousing.org](http://www.manufacturedhousing.org)*