

Steelworkers Urge Leaders to Reject Auto Plans That Close Plants

WASHINGTON, May 19 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The United Steelworkers (USW) today urged Congress and the Administration to reject any taxpayer-supported plan to restructure automobile companies that would export jobs instead of strengthen the domestic industry.

North America's largest industrial union made the point today at a "teach-in" on Capitol Hill sponsored by mayors, workers, business leaders, and labor officials to educate lawmakers about the impact on their communities.

Nationwide, more than 7.2 million jobs are related to the auto industry in supply and manufacturing, as well as in health care, education, civil services and many more areas. Thousands of small businesses and local communities could be irreparably damaged if the auto industry is allowed to fail.

"During our recent 'Keep It Made in America' bus tour, we met people from across the nation who are terrified about the future of their communities and their families," said Leo W. Gerard, USW International President.

"We met mayors, high school principals and firefighters who are worried about the loss of tax revenue in their towns, small-business owners who say they will have to shut down if manufacturing leaves their cities, and laid-off moms and dads who desperately want to go back to work making auto parts. Some of them are struggling to feed their kids, and they're angry that their tax dollars could be used to export jobs," Gerard said.

The teach-in featured several videos documenting the impact of the auto industry on communities such as Fort Wayne, Ind., where thousands of workers making everything from gears and axles to windshield wipers are laid off, and the impact has begun to trickle down to teachers, paralegals and others who are also losing jobs. The videos can be viewed on www.usw.org [1] or www.driveamericaforward.org [2].

Doug May, a laid-off steelworker with more than three decades' experience in a mill in Granite City, Ill., shared his story of personal struggle during the teach-in.

"When we don't make cars in this country, we don't need to make as much steel, auto parts, computer chips, windshields, tires and countless other materials that go into the car. That means people like me don't have jobs. When we don't have good jobs, we can't spend money in our local communities,"

May said. "But it's about more than money. We're losing our right to a retirement with dignity, to health care for our families, to an honest day's work so we can pay

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our mortgages, send our kids and grandkids to college -- we're losing the American Dream."

Michael Herron, bargaining chairman for United Auto Workers Local 1853 in Spring Hill, said the crisis is about more than auto jobs, and Americans are counting on their elected officials to do the right thing for the millions of workers and their families who count on the auto sector for their livelihoods.

"If our country uses our taxpayer dollars to support the deindustrialization of America, then they are subsidizing the destruction of thousands of communities, millions of middle-class families and the futures of our children and grandchildren," Herron said. "We need a plan that supports domestic manufacturing and benefits not just U.S. companies, but the American people."

The USW, the Alliance for American Manufacturing, the Mayors and Municipalities Automotive Coalition and others are urging Congress and the Administration to:

-- Stimulate domestic demand for automobiles. For example, creating an incentive program like cash-for-clunkers with a strong domestic content requirement and restoring credit for consumers and businesses.

-- Spend American tax dollars to support domestic jobs, investment, and innovation, and reject off-shoring as a path to profitability for GM and Chrysler.

-- Restore cooperative innovation and research and development efforts. A National Automotive Research and Development Program, for example, could provide incentives for companies to create programs that lead to better, safer, and more fuel-efficient vehicles -- built domestically.

-- Change health care policy to eliminate structural problems for the domestic auto industry. The Big Three's foreign competitors benefit from either national health care plans or through offering substandard benefits.

-- Ensure trade policy promotes U.S. interests. The U.S. imports \$41.5 billion in cars and light trucks from Japan and \$7.5 billion for Korea, while we export only \$534 million and \$373 million respectively. We must address non-tariff barriers to trade in these markets, end currency misalignment and aggressively enforce our trade laws to eliminate unfair trade practices.

The USW represents 850,000 workers in the U.S. and Canada employed in the industries of metals, rubber, chemicals, paper, oil refining and the service sector. For more information: www.usw.org [1].

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Links:

[1] <http://www.usw.org>

[2] <http://www.driveamericaforward.org>