

Feds Offer \$19 Million In Grants To Ex-NUMMI Workers

Evelyn Nieves, Associated Press Writer

FREMONT, Calif. (AP) — U.S. Labor Secretary Hilda Solis said Monday that the federal government will provide \$19 million in emergency grants to help thousands of workers who lost their jobs when California's only auto plant closed.

Solis said the money would be used to retrain workers at New United Motor Manufacturing Inc., known as NUMMI, but also to help those who can't make their mortgage payments or need an extension for health care coverage. She stressed that the money would be used not only to help the 4,700 workers who lost their jobs but also thousands of suppliers who lost the bulk of their business when the 25-year-old plant shut down April 1.

"This is for counseling, assistance, training, assessment," said Solis, speaking at the NUMMI Reemployment Center, a one-stop employment and retraining center across the street from the plant.

Solis spoke two weeks after President Barack Obama visited a solar power plant in Fremont being built with the help of federal stimulus funds. She said Obama had a keen interest in making sure that former NUMMI workers have the opportunity to be retrained in the new technologies.

For example, Solis said, Tesla Motors Inc., the electric car manufacturer that plans to team with Toyota Motor Corp. and open an electric car plant at the former NUMMI site, should put a special emphasis on retraining former NUMMI employees in how to build such cars.

Tesla plans to hire 1,200 workers to build an electric sedan scheduled to go on sale in 2012.

"We're urging Tesla to work with the dislocated workers so we don't lose this brain trust," Solis said.

The NUMMI plant was a joint venture between Toyota and General Motors Corp. before the Detroit auto giant filed for bankruptcy protection in 2009. Its existence drew thousands to Fremont for its relatively high-paying union jobs, but Toyota announced that without its partner, the plant would probably close.

Even with all the warnings, Toyota's departure has had a devastating effect on the former employees and thousands of others whose businesses were made servicing and supplying the plant and its workers, Fremont officials said.

Since the last Corolla sedan rolled off NUMMI's assembly line, more than 2,000

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former workers have applied for help with the Reemployment Center, said Craig Palmquist, its director.

"We're having a job fair here later today," Palmquist said. "We're trying everything."

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