

December 5, 2008
www.autoworkercaravan.org
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Monday, Dec. 8 at 11 a.m. at House office building, 2226 Rayburn, 2nd Floor: Press conference on auto workers' agenda for the transformation of the U.S. auto industry.

Auto Workers Hit the Hill

Auto workers and retirees have organized a caravan from several Midwest states to Congress Monday, December 8, to speak with lawmakers and media about the need for a strong manufacturing base. They see the crisis facing the Big Three as an opportunity to transform the auto industry and to lay the foundations for a more sustainable economy. They will hold a press conference Monday, Dec. 8 at 11 a.m. at 2226 Rayburn, on the 2nd floor.

Executives from the Big Three, dealerships, auto suppliers and union leaders have paraded before skeptical lawmakers. But the workers who make these vehicles and live in these communities—those who would be most impacted if the Big Three go under—need to be heard.

The caravan brings together unionized auto workers from GM, Chrysler and Ford to share what they know is true: Their communities depend on the decent jobs in the auto industry, and if the country wants good jobs for the long-term, lawmakers need to think beyond half-measures like cash infusions in exchange for selling the corporate jets. Throwing money down the corporate rathole won't fix the problem.

Congress needs a comprehensive plan not just for the Big Three but for a national industrial policy that supports and expands the middle class and addresses the economic and environmental crisis facing the entire nation.

"I'm going on the caravan to D.C. because the workers need a say," said Tony Browning, a member of UAW Local 1700 who works at Chrysler Sterling Heights Assembly. "This country has a bad perception of auto workers—they think we sit back and make all this money. I've been on the line for 34 years, and I know we do hard work. We're the ones who have sacrificed with concessions and wage freezes. The companies mismanaged the money. How can executives make 374 times more than a rank and filer?"

Auto workers will challenge the widespread misunderstanding that "overpaid" union members are the source of Detroit's problems. Commerce Department data show that cutting workers' wages won't restore the Big Three to profitability. Auto makers spend almost as much on fenders and hubcaps as they do on wages, and even if every factory worker in Detroit worked for free it would only shave 5 percent off the sticker price of a car.

Auto retirees will explain how the companies can deal with high "legacy" costs of retiree healthcare and pensions—by taking immediate action on the nation's healthcare crisis. Every single other industrialized nation has a government-subsidized healthcare system that provides care at cheaper cost to companies. That's why the Big Three are closing factories in the U.S. and opening them in Canada, where they have national healthcare.

Detroit's auto workers want lawmakers to use this moment to transform the country's industrial capacity and engineering know-how and produce the 21st century's answer to the interstate highway system.

"I'm going to tell Congress that we need to revitalize auto because industry is the backbone of this country," said Al Benchich, retired president of UAW Local 909 at GM Powertrain. "I want to tell them that we need a new national industrial policy, created by a coalition of labor, government and industry, to find a way to convert factories to the production of wind turbines, mass transit and fuel-efficient vehicles. Workers must have a voice at the table."