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Remarks of Senator Barack Obama: Macomb Community College

Warren, MI | May 14, 2008

Earlier today, I went for a tour of the Chrysler stamping plant in Sterling Heights, and I listened to folks tell me about how hard it is to get by in this economy. And the record oil prices mean that it's even harder for automakers and autoworkers - especially at a time when they're struggling to meet the demands of a 21st Century economy.

Since the beginning of this year, thousands of Chrysler workers have lost their jobs. The entire industry has shed 300,000 jobs in the past eight years - about a third of which were lost in Michigan. That's hundreds of thousands of workers who will no longer be able to count on a paycheck to pay the rising costs of health care and college; gas and groceries. And those who are lucky enough to avoid getting laid off are still feeling the pressures of restructuring.

Not too far from here, at American Axle, UAW members have gone on strike to fight for good wages, and good benefits, and a decent standard of living. These are things that all hardworking families should expect and that UAW members deserve, and we stand in solidarity with the folks on the picket lines, and the families impacted by this strike.

Their struggle is part of a larger struggle that's being waged not just in Michigan, but all across the country. It's a struggle to ensure that we have good manufacturing jobs so American workers can raise a family, have health care when they need it, put their children through college, and retire with dignity and security. They're common hopes, modest dreams, but they're slipping out of reach for too many families.

Now, a big part of the reason autoworkers are struggling on the factory floor is because of decisions that were made in the boardroom. Rather than invest in the fuel-efficient cars of the future, auto executives invested in the SUVs and large trucks that may have helped meet a rising demand, but that essentially guaranteed that they would be outpaced by foreign competitors and that the industry's long-term problems would be harder to solve.

But American automakers have been showing leadership in recent years. Ford has now tied Toyota in the quality of the cars they're making, and they're spending more on R&D than nearly any other company in the world. Chrysler is working to develop a system that integrates electric motors with a fixed-gear transmission. And GM is releasing an average of one new hybrid model every three months for the next two years. So we're certainly taking steps in the right direction.

But we must do more. And when I'm President, we will. We won't just support the autoworkers in Michigan who built the auto industry, and keep it strong in good times and bad. And we won't just revive and strengthen our automakers. We'll revive and strengthen all of American manufacturing. These have been a disastrous eight years for our manufacturers. We've lost nearly 4 million good-paying jobs, including hundreds of thousands in Michigan, and more than 36,000 manufacturers have closed their doors. We can't afford to continue down this path. Manufacturing supports one in six American jobs - jobs that pay more and offer better benefits than other jobs - and we all have a stake in saving them.

It's time to recapture the spirit of innovation that has always fueled America's economic success. It's time we had an economy that was driven not just by foreign debt, but by the power of America's imagination. It's time to tap the ingenuity of engineers and entrepreneurs, policy experts and working folks to meet the challenges of our time.

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That's what this election is all about. So while this is a moment of challenge, it's also a moment of opportunity. And the question you'll face in November is which candidate can lead America to seize it.

Now, when John McCain came to Michigan in January and said that we couldn't bring all these jobs back to America, he was right. But where he's wrong is in suggesting that there's nothing we can do to replace those jobs or create new ones. Where he's wrong is in not offering new solutions or economic policies that are different from what George Bush has given us for eight long years. That's wrong. That's giving up. And that's not what this country is about.

I won't stand here and tell you that we'll be able to stop every job from going overseas or bring every job back. But I will tell you that we can end the Bush-McCain policy of giving tax breaks to companies that ship our jobs overseas, and we can start giving those tax breaks to companies that create good-paying jobs right here in America. Instead of opposing job training similar to what's being offered at M-Tech, like John McCain has, we can make sure every American has the skills to compete in the global economy. We don't have to stand idly by while foreign competitors outpace us in making the cars of the future. I'm running for President to make sure that the cars of the future are made where they've always been made - right here in Michigan. Because the fight for American manufacturing is the fight for America's future - and I believe that's a fight this country will win.

And so today, I'm announcing a manufacturing agenda that will lift up hardworking families, strengthen innovative companies, and foster our common prosperity. The first part of this agenda is investing in clean energy - because that isn't just how we'll get gas prices under control, combat climate change, and free ourselves from the tyranny of oil; it's also how we'll expand American manufacturing, create quality jobs, and grow our economy.

That's why I'll invest \$150 billion over the next ten years in the green energy sector. This will create up to five million new green jobs - and those are jobs that pay well and can't be outsourced. And I'll be a President who finally keeps the promise that's made year after year after year by providing domestic automakers with the funding they need to retool their factories and make fuel-efficient and alternative fuel cars. My own state of Illinois is home to the oldest, continually operating Ford assembly plant outside Michigan, so I understand why it's so important to bring our auto industry into the 21st Century. And that's what we'll do when I'm President.

Here's what else we'll do. We'll invest \$10 billion a year in creating a Clean Technologies Deployment Venture Capital Fund that will meet a critical need. Today, 85% of North America's automotive research is done right here in Michigan. But too often, breakthrough technologies that are invented in America end up getting built overseas because of the cost of getting these new technologies commercialized. This government-backed fund will help solve this problem by creating an initiative right here in Michigan that will accelerate the development and deployment of cutting-edge vehicle technologies. To take one example, this fund will help American companies build batteries for plug-in hybrid vehicles so we don't have to buy them from abroad. That's how we'll make sure American automakers continue to lead the world, and that's how we'll make sure that American manufacturers don't just survive, but actually thrive in this century.

The second part of my agenda is making sure that manufacturers are getting the support they need from Washington. Here in Michigan, you've got the Michigan 21st Century Jobs Fund, a state initiative to help businesses with the most innovative proposals create new products and jobs in this state. I believe that's an approach we need to replicate across the country. And that's what I'll do as President by creating an Advanced Manufacturing Fund that will invest in innovation and job creation in places that have been hard hit by the decline in manufacturing.

We'll also make the research and development tax credit permanent so we can encourage companies to do their research and create jobs right here in America. And we'll stop slashing funding for the Manufacturing Extension Partnership, and start doubling it. This program helped create and protect over 50,000 jobs in 2006 alone, and has been proven to increase the productivity of small and midsize manufacturers by up to 16%. That's the kind of smart investment that will help us rebuild American manufacturing and make America more competitive.

The third thing we'll do is invest in America's long-term competitiveness by putting a college degree within reach for all Americans and by helping community colleges like Macomb develop associate degree programs in green technology to help make sure the next generation of workers have the skills they need to build the cars of the future. And we'll finally solve our health care crisis once and for all. This is a crisis that's not only leaving 47 million Americans without health insurance and millions more struggling to pay rising costs. It's also hampering our economic competitiveness. We've all heard how health care accounts for about \$1500 of every car that's made in America.

We have to change that. That's why unlike John McCain, I have a universal health care plan. It's a plan that will cut health care costs by up to \$2500 per family per year and reduce costs for business and their workers by picking up the tab for some of the most expensive illnesses and conditions. And we're not going to do it twenty years from now, or ten years from now - we're going to do it by the end of my first term as President of the United States.



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Finally, if we want to fight for manufacturers here at home, we have to fight for them around the world. Now, I believe in trade, but I also believe that for America to compete and win in the global economy, trade has to work for all Americans. That means making sure that our workers are competing on a level playing field, and that countries like China aren't breaking the rules and putting American workers at a disadvantage. Fighting for our workers isn't bad for business; it's good for our economy. And it's how we'll make sure that the costs and benefits of our global economy are being shared more fairly.

So the American people will have a clear choice in November when I'm the nominee - it's a choice between more of the same failed Bush policies that have done nothing but harm to American manufacturing over the last eight years; and real change that will help write a new chapter in the story of American manufacturing. For the sake of our families, our economy, and our leadership in the world, we have to renew the promise of American manufacturing.

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