



December 10, 2008

McCotter's remarks before passage of auto bill

Here are the revised and extended floor remarks of U.S. Rep. Thaddeus McCotter of Michigan, a Livonia Republican, before passage of the auto recovery bill Wednesday. The transcript was provided by his office.

Rep. McCotter: Thank you.

I come from Michigan. I was born in Detroit. Wherever you go in the world, people know two things about Detroit. They know we make cars, and they know we make music: Motown. And so when we find ourselves in difficult situations, it is not unusual for us to refer to music to help keep our lucidity and our balance; to come through the tough times. And as I listen to the debate on the auto industry, in many ways I'm reminded of a Bob Seger song where he says: 'To the IRS, I'm another file, I'm just a statistic on a sheet, I feel like a number. But I'm not a number, I'm a man.' We've heard a lot of talk about the policy under-girding this bill. There are good arguments on both sides. But I live with the people who will be affected by it.

There have been those who said bankruptcy is an option. Many people have said bankruptcy is a preferred option. I suppose bankruptcy is an option for those who it is not a option for. Why? Because those who like bankruptcy should first impose bankruptcy upon themselves and to see how their family feels when their future has been foreclosed, when they have no job, when they have no hope, when they believe that they had been forgotten because they are a number. We can talk about the small businesses. We have small businesses in Michigan. And they rely on manufacturing jobs in the auto industry to stay in business. Because the ripple effect is not a ripple effect; it is a tsunami effect. For one manufacturing job, you will lose seven to ten others and we in Michigan have felt this pain, oh we have felt this pain. And we have seen the cost of the restructuring that so many here seem oblivious to. But again we're numbers, I guess, in Michigan. We're statistics. We are involved in systems. We've been devoid of souls, evidently, at least by the opinion makers and leaders that have not watched the restructuring that so many of us on both sides of the aisle have watched for years.

But we're from Michigan. We did not complain. We kept our nose to the grindstone. We gritted our teeth. We suffered and endured. We endured as businesses closed, as white collar and blue collar jobs were lost. We endured as retirees worried about what would happen to their hard-earned lifetime of benefits -- those legacy costs so many are so willing to shave -- our senior citizens' lifetimes of hard work. They played by the rules which bankruptcy would change.

We have heard a lot about the quality gap. We have heard a lot about the cost. I guess we should make less to be like everybody else. It's not a very attractive option for real people. But if you are a number, if you're a statistic on a sheet this makes perfect sense. It's very logical. It's very logical unless you start to worry about the person behind the statistic, the person who gets to look amongst their Christmas cards for (a) layoff notice, the ones who have already had an anxious Thanksgiving as we performed our due diligence upon the executives and president Gettelfinger of the UAW and had them come in and testify. We asked them how they got here. We asked them why they were in a restructuring now, again, as if the last several years had never happened. And I think they were productive meetings in the end. They've brought us here to a bill that we believe can protect

taxpayers and can help an industry that has been restructuring continue to survive.

And if the bridge loan is passed, will we be happy in Detroit? Will we be happy in manufacturing throughout America? No. And it's not because it's not the money we wanted. It's because we know a painful restructuring will continue if this bridge loan is approved.

You see, to me this is not abstract. When my son, the oldest son, turned 14, he looked at me and he said: 'Hey dad, I know what I want to be when I grow up.' I said: 'Well as long as it's not a congressman, I'm ok with that, whatever it is.' And he looked at me and he said: 'I want to be an automotive engineer.' And because of the restructuring in the auto industry, because of the pain that we've had, and because of the reality that our children will leave us for better climates economically and otherwise, I didn't have the heart to tell my son that the likelihood of him achieving his dream of being an automotive engineer would be foreclosed to him. And there are so many other children that grow up loving cars that will have that experience. And it is not just the children, it is the parents; the parents who work in the industry, white collar, blue collar. And my Republican friends, it is not just the white collar we must worry about.

I had a very interesting experience when I talk to people on my side of the aisle about the UAW and their concessions. Give credit where credit is due: they have been a partner with the Big 3 in making painful concessions. And I hope one vignette will suffice. I once spent a freezing winter morning in front of the glass house, the Ford motor company corporate headquarters, in Dearborn. All those employees, those UAW members, that people say don't want to work come to work and don't want to perform, don't care about their quality of performance. Well I'll tell you what: they stood out in zero degree temperatures to keep the Wixom plant in my district open. That's how badly they wanted to work. That's how much they cared about the production of those cars. That's how much they love their families.

For those who think we have not been restructuring, the Wixom plant was closed as part of the Ford motor company's restructuring. How many more people that want to work will be precluded because we did not give them the opportunity? We hear that the auto industry has brought it on itself. Well that's what Washington does. Washington makes bad decisions and blames the victim. I will not go into the painful litany of how Washington has not been as helpful as it could be. But let (it) suffice to say, that throughout the entire restructuring process that we have endured and know will continue, we did not come here with our hand out, did we? We did not ask the federal government to take over all the health care of the employees. We did not ask the federal government to keep the Wixom plant open. We did not ask the federal government to do anything but leave us alone while we continued our painful restructuring and gritted our teeth and kept our nose to the grindstone. And now circumstances outside of our control have led us to the point where we have to be here or there will be no domestic auto industry in the United States. And there will be no manufacturing base in the United States. And this at a time when it has been pointed out the taxpayers that work in the auto industry are watching the people at AIG talk about \$4 million per person bonuses after they have been bailed out to the tune of roughly forty billion in this last round of their dollars. But then again when you're a statistic, when you're a number, those things don't really matter to the people who have to make the decisions.

We come here to make decisions as best we can in public policy, but the overriding goal is to serve the people that those policies affect. And in my mind the failure of sound policies here at least gives us a chance to give these people to survive, to keep a manufacturing sector in place in the United States, and to let these working families continue to endure and grit their teeth and keep their nose to the grindstone and work and hope for the best. Because if we do not, we will be confirming that they are statistics, they are numbers, that they are worthy of bankruptcy because that's what makes economic sense -- if not moral and societal sense.

And to close, I remember very well coming home after the Thanksgiving for the Thanksgiving break, after we had the auto industry in. And I was driving past a Jefferson plant listening to Seger's "Makin'

Thunderbirds." In the song, he sings about how "back in '55 we were young and strong, we were makin' Thunderbirds."

But the plant was quiet. Another victim of a painful restructuring we endured and many in Congress never noticed, because we were numbers and statistics, not individuals and souls. Saddened, I put on Springsteen's "Youngstown":

"From the Monongahela Valley to the Mesabi Iron-Range
To the coal mines of Appalachia, the story's always the same
Seven hundred tons of metal a day, now sir you tell me the world's changed
Once I made you rich enough, rich enough to forget my name."

The American auto industry has served us as the "Arsenal of Democracy" and the "Engine of Prosperity." Without these working men and women, America would not be -- and cannot remain -- the Greatest Nation on Earth.

Now that they have made us rich enough, let us not forget their names; and vote yes on this bill.

The speaker pro tempore: Time has expired.

Rep. McCotter: Thank you.
