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USW Says Goodyear Repeatedly Snubs Offer of Experienced Tire Builders to Solve Military Production for Soldiers in Iraq

Company scoffs at offer; claims there's no problem

(Pittsburgh, PA) – The United Steelworkers (USW) today blasted Goodyear's neglect in responding to the USW long-standing offer to meet the challenge of fully satisfying the demand for tires on Humvees used by soldiers in Iraq.

Yesterday, Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-Calif.), chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, requested that the company and union work out a deal to return 200 striking workers to a production plant in Topeka, Kansas to meet the military needs for its Humvees, the workhorse vehicle in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Although Goodyear continues to claim that it is meeting the military's production needs, Rep. Hunter says that with production levels reduced by 35%, there is a shortage within the military.

"We have long recognized this potential problem and have made a number of offers to the company to work collectively to solve it," said Tom Conway, USW International vice president. "We put it in writing on October 2, when we delivered notice to the company of our intent to terminate our contract extension agreement."

In a letter addressed to Jim Allen, Goodyear Director, Global Labor Relations, Conway wrote:

"With regard to the manufacture of any product used directly to support our nation's troops, we are prepared to meet with you to discuss an orderly process that would allow the Company's non-bargaining unit personnel to continue to meet those limited needs."

The 200-worker proposal originated with the USW and was part of a plan developed by Robert Tripp, USW Local 307 president at the Goodyear-Topeka facility. "We clearly understand the needs of our soldiers," said Tripp. "Many of our members are Veterans. We are more than willing to do our part to provide them with the best equipment possible."

Following Rep. Duncan's call yesterday to USW International Leo W. Gerard, Conway approached Goodyear with another offer to help the company meet the demands of the military. "They dismissed the offer and refused to even acknowledge that a problem exists," said Conway.

Just this morning Conway approached the company with yet another offer: If Goodyear would dismiss the temporary workers in Topeka, within hours, the company will have a crew of 200 experienced Steelworker tire builders in the plant to make sure the needs of the troops are met. Goodyear declined the request, saying that it had an internal meeting and concluded that the situation is “under control.”

“Let’s set the record straight,” said Conway, a Vietnam era veteran. “We have family members fighting in Iraq, so we want to do everything necessary to ensure their safety. That’s why we have time and time again offered our help so that the company can meet the needs of our fighting men and women.”

Goodyear forced more than 15,000 workers in 16 plants in the U.S. and Canada out on strike on October 5 by refusing to negotiate a fair and equitable contract with its USW-represented employees. Despite sacrifices made by workers and retirees three years ago to help the company get back on track, Goodyear continues to insist on more closures and health care cuts.

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