



Washington Congressman Brian Baird talks to union workers at Oregon Iron Works about "Buy American" legislation he is pushing.

# Baird blasts Bush for letting Bay Bridge use foreign steel

VANCOUVER — At a March 21 rally at Oregon Iron Works, Washington 3rd District Congressman Brian Baird accused the Bush Administration of trying to outsource American jobs by failing to enforce "Buy American" provisions in a 1982 law.

The law requires that domestic iron and steel be used in federally-funded transportation projects unless that would increase the cost of the project by more than 25 percent.

Baird said the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has collaborated with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to interpret the law in ways that violate its intent. Caltrans is replacing parts of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge to make it better able to withstand a severe earthquake. The project has undergone several redesigns, extensive delays, and massive cost-overruns, and is currently expected to cost taxpayers \$6.2 billion.

Caltrans has said it will apply the Buy American law's 25 percent requirement to just the steel superstructure portion of the project, rather than to the cost of the overall project. Caltrans also has maintained that Buy American doesn't apply because the project uses only state money.

Baird said the Federal Highway Administration has cooperated with Caltrans by withholding federal funding until the project has been bid on.

That violates a "sense of Congress" resolution that Democrat Baird succeeded in adding to the transportation bill passed last year. But such resolutions are nonbinding, and in October, FHWA's top lawyer wrote in an internal memo that the agency doesn't intend to be bound by it.

Oregon Iron Works had hoped to compete for the contract, and was one

of four structural steel manufacturers in Oregon and Southwest Washington that formed a consortium to bid on the Bay Bridge work. The companies are currently producing steel for the bridge's east span, but didn't bid on the project's next stage, the center span.

Thomas Hickman, marketing manager for Oregon Iron Works, said because of the way Caltrans was interpreting Buy American law, they knew their bid would be noncompetitive. The contract would have meant 5 million hours of work, and to complete it, Oregon Iron Works would have built a new facility and hired 300 people at union wages; workers at the company are represented by Iron Workers Shopmen's Local 516.

Last year, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger asked Chinese steel contractors to bid on the project, and most observers predict a Chinese

company will get the contract.

Local 516 Business Agent Mike Lappier said the Buy American provision is about protecting good jobs.

"The workers here face a threat," Lappier said, "not from a foreign army but from an army of foreign workers, who are so low-paid they don't make enough in a day to buy a Happy Meal."

The contract was bid March 22 and Caltrans is expected to make a decision within 30 days.

Baird introduced legislation Feb. 8 that would strengthen the Buy American provision's enforcement. He also has asked Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta to enforce Buy American more aggressively.

"All they care about are the short-term costs," Baird said. "But the government ought to be willing to pay more if it means jobs for American workers."

## Delphi asks bankruptcy court to void union pacts

NEW YORK (PAI) — As expected, Delphi Auto Parts asked a federal bankruptcy court judge on March 31 to let it void all of its union contracts. The proposed cuts were so drastic that the lead Delphi union, the United Auto Workers, said if implemented, the company's plan could lead to a strike. The next hearing on Delphi is May 8.

Delphi's request came barely a week after UAW agreed with the bankrupt auto parts maker on a buyout proposal to offer to all 24,000 UAW members there. There was no indication of how many would take the buyout, and UAW General President Ron Gettelfinger said Delphi's plan to kill the contracts also "kills the momentum" from that.

If Delphi succeeds, workers wages would drop from an average of \$27 an hour now to \$22 an hour later this year and \$16 an hour next year.

Delphi originally wanted to cut workers' wages to \$9.50 an hour.

"Delphi's misuse of bankruptcy to circumvent the collective bargaining process and slash jobs and wages and drastically reduce health care, retirement and other hard-won benefits or eliminate them altogether is a travesty and a concern for every American," Gettelfinger and UAW Vice President Richard Shoemaker said. "Delphi's proposal goes far beyond cutting wages and benefits for active and retired work-

ers. Delphi's outrageous proposal would slash the company's UAW-represented hourly workforce by approximately 75 percent, devastating Delphi workers, their families and their communities."

"Delphi's motions with the bankruptcy court — like the quality of the proposals it made to the UAW — are another indication Delphi has never been serious about finding a solution to its current problems through the collective bargaining process," they added.

The International Union of Electronic, Electrical, Salaried, Machine and Furniture Workers, an affiliate of Communications Workers of America, the second-largest of the six unions at Delphi, represents 8,500 of the firm's workers, was also upset. Seven of its eight locals, at plants in Alabama, Mississippi, New Jersey and Ohio, have already held strike authorization votes.

Delphi wants "to set aside our collective bargaining agreements, and eliminate retiree health care and life insurance. Every working man and woman should share our disappointment and our concern. If left unchecked, actions like this threaten the very existence of the middle class in this country. We will use every weapon in our arsenal to insure that this is not allowed to happen," IUE's Henry Reichard said.

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