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**James P. Hoffa: Labor Voices**

## **Mexican trucks don't belong on U.S. highways**



Unemployment is still high in Michigan and will remain so for some time. The economic recession blew a hole in the state budget, and government workers' wages are likely to be cut. Given this bleak picture, it makes no sense to let Mexico's trucking companies take American truck drivers' jobs and depress American workers' wages.

The Department of Transportation last week proposed that the United States re-start a cross-border trucking program with Mexico — part of the NAFTA trade deal. The Bush administration had already tried such a program and failed. Though the Bush program cost taxpayers \$500 million, U.S. officials still weren't able to verify that all Mexican trucks were checked when they crossed the border. Hardly any Mexican trucks ended up driving beyond the border zone — about three a day.

The tremendous cost to taxpayers doesn't even take into account the horrifying drug violence in Mexico. Ciudad Juarez, just across the river from El Paso, is the most dangerous city in the world. Texas public safety officials warned travelers not to go to Mexico over the holidays, and the U.S. Homeland Security Department notified the trucking industry in October that criminals already hijacked over 10,000 trucks in Mexico that year. Homeland Security also reported that, "Drug traffickers also have been known to hijack and clone legitimate commercial trucks to transport illicit cargo across the border."

My union will fight against opening the border to Mexican trucks. We simply don't believe U.S. taxpayers should pay to let more Mexican companies depress American workers' wages.

We aren't just fighting for workers whose living standards would be threatened by opening the border. We're fighting for the safety of all Americans. We don't want drugs and violence coming north. And we don't want dangerous trucks driving along our highways. We don't think Mexican law enforcement officials can guarantee the safety of their trucks and drivers, especially when they're consumed with a violent drug war.

The United States has an enormous automotive trade deficit with Mexico. We sent a good chunk of our auto manufacturing to Mexico, which sells us over \$42 billion more autos, trucks and automotive parts than we sell them. We shouldn't be rewarding Mexico for taking much of our auto industry by giving them the cross-border trucking program they want. We should be taking back our auto industry.

It simply isn't true that jobs lost to Mexico will never come back. Ford is bringing back to Michigan jobs assembling battery packs for hybrid vehicles from Mexico. Sallie Mae, the student loan company, said it would move 2,000 call-center jobs back from India, Mexico and the Philippines. General Electric is bringing 200 refrigerator-manufacturing jobs back to Bloomington, Ind., from Mexico. The company was motivated by tax credits for making new, greener refrigerators.

There's power in a union. There's power in collective action. Our elected representatives will be forced to listen if we keep telling them we don't want the Mexican border opened and we want good jobs brought back to America.

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