

Good Afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you here today.

My name is Dave Bevard. I worked at Maytag Refrigeration Products in Galesburg, Illinois for 32 years, along with my wife, Pat. We were two of the approximately 2,500 people at the plant who believed that if you worked hard, played by the rules and made a quality product, you would be rewarded for your efforts. Instead, on October 11, 2002, we were given a pink slip and told that our plant would close and move to Mexico within two years. At the time of the closing, I was President of I.A.M. Local 2063 representing our workers at the facility.

Until you have experienced it, you cannot truly appreciate the emotional devastation of knowing that the world as you know it is gone. After the final plant closing, I was able to work for the next year as a peer counselor through an outstanding AFL-CIO community service program to assist my fellow dislocated workers.

In Galesburg, we were fortunate to have an excellent local Workforce Investment group to work with us as well as assistance from the State of Illinois, who set up a facility for workers with additional programs and funding. I was able to experience first hand and through working with my friends and co-workers the transition through job loss and into an uncertain future.

The first necessity for displaced workers is counseling. As a peer counselor, I saw many individuals who were ready to throw up their hands and completely give up. With counseling and referring them through the proper channels, we were able to assist workers through their journey. Counseling works.

Work very much defines a person. Job loss is devastating and the feelings of

abandonment, failure, fear, anger and others are often not adequately addressed. Job loss is usually unexpected and most people are not prepared to reinvent themselves and determine what to do with the rest of their lives. Amid the emotional turmoil of the job loss, workers are quickly buried in a morass of bureaucracy and information that is difficult at best to sort out and comprehend.

Maneuvering through the Trade Adjustment Act and other programs can be like entering a bureaucratic minefield. One wrong step and you may lose out on your eligibility for benefits. Further, it is often difficult to get clear and consistent answers concerning eligibility and available benefits. The result is that programs are not always uniformly implemented from one area to another or even within the same area. Workers would greatly benefit from having a single point of contact and support so they can receive clear, concise and consistent interpretation of programs and their implementation. Since Unemployment Insurance is the first thing many workers seek when they lose a job, it would make sense to me that the Unemployment Insurance program have trained and dedicated staff to provide the outreach, intake, counseling and referral help that trade affected workers need.

For those who qualify for federal benefits, such as those available through the Trade Adjustment Act, they do provide some additional assistance for displaced workers for which we are grateful, but they are not without their shortcomings. In very general terms, TAA is supposed to provide up to two years of training or education supplemented in conjunction with two years of unemployment. Unfortunately, plant closures rarely follow such a tidy schedule and schooling and unemployment benefits rarely coincide. In our case, the plant closed in late September, so unemployment benefits began in October.

However, schooling or training for most individuals, did not start until the following January. Many people must then decide whether to compromise their program into something shorter or decide what they will do when their income runs out three months before their schooling is completed.

When workers do choose a course of study, there may not be programs available in their area of interest. If there are educational programs available, these programs may not be in fields that are determined to be “growth areas” and are therefore ineligible for funding. Sometimes educational facilities are not equipped to handle the number of applicants. Also, accredited schooling and training programs can often be in a state of flux. A program may be accepted under TAA at the beginning of a semester only to be dropped by the end.

A major problem in our area was funding. There were numerous periods of gaps in funding. When laid off, workers attempted to sign up for training only to find that there were only enough funds for a portion of them. The others were put on hold until more funding came through. Meanwhile, their unemployment benefits are ticking away. Due to funding delays and available programs, some workers were in effect forced to scrap the educational opportunities that they were supposed to be entitled to. Workers should not be penalized for lack of funding.

There are two other areas of concern that should be mentioned; financial counseling and health care. With job loss and re-employment at a lower income level, financial counseling should be made available to everyone. Also with our job loss was the loss of health care benefits. In Illinois, Gov. Blagojevich has implemented a program called AllKids which makes affordable healthcare available for all children in our state.

This program has been a godsend for parents. However, due to the high cost and lack of benefits from their new jobs, far too many parents go without any health care and are one catastrophic illness away from disaster.

The promise and end result of all of the training is supposed to be workers who are trained in technical and specialized skills and placed in “better” jobs. In our experience, most of the workers who have completed their schooling have jobs in fields not related to their training. Also, with only a handful of exceptions, the new jobs pay substantially less than the job lost and usually with few if any benefits. In many cases, workers are reemployed in jobs that pay half of what they were previously making.

As for my own personal experience, my wife had great difficulty, psychologically, adjusting to the loss of the job that she had loved for thirty years. She was hired to work part time in retail until she was diagnosed with cancer last September. She is currently completing her treatments. Upon the plant closure, I was fortunate to work for over a year as a peer counselor working to transition my fellow co-workers into their new lives. After that, I was able to work in a contract job that lasted a few months. I stayed home, after that, to assist my wife through her surgery and recovery. I had applied for schooling but our area has again been experiencing funding gaps so currently there is no money available. Today, I am unemployed and looking for work. I have found that despite my background, my age works against me. We are lucky enough to currently have health care but the costs are severely cutting into us and we are concerned about losing it due to cost.

While we are grateful for the programs that are available, I don't know what we would have done without them; these programs do have serious shortcomings and could

be greatly improved. The plain truth is that none of these programs make up for failed trade policies or adequately compensate us for our job loss and the disruption of our lives. Trade Adjustment Assistance and other programs are no substitute for fair trade agreements. Bad trade policies are devastating our manufacturing industry and are hurting millions of workers. We must have fair trade agreements and ways to create and keep good jobs so that we can keep our middle class which is the bedrock of our democracy.

I would again like to thank Chairman Miller and the Committee for this opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions.