

Community Needs G.E.'s Good Jobs

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Workers today are often told they are lucky to have a job, any job. With unemployment hitting double-digit levels in many cities and more than 30 million Americans looking for work nationally, the outlook for more jobs and better-paying jobs would appear to be bleak indeed. I believe we have an obligation to our families and our community to actively reject this view and to start by protecting the jobs we already have.

Here in Albuquerque, more than 400 of my fellow employees at General Electric Aviation were recently told their jobs would end when the facility shuts down in the fall of 2010. Like so many other employees, we were told the soft economy was to blame. Over the years many Albuquerque workers have provided for their families using the good wage and benefit jobs provided by the G.E. plant that were secured through their union contracts.

We are now in a fight to save these high-quality jobs and allow our children — and their children — the same opportunities that we have enjoyed. This fight is not only about getting more paychecks for ourselves, although that is important. This is about saving our community and its future.

Every good job at G.E. creates three more in the community as we do business at the dry cleaners, grocery stores, movie theaters, restaurants and all the other small businesses that make this such a great area to live in.

This struggle to save G.E. is about leaving a quality option

for our children and their ability to provide for their families in the future. These high-quality jobs have been in our community for 40 years and played a crucial role in our standard of living. We have an obligation to give our children the same opportunities to enjoy a good level of compensation and benefits.

American families have always sacrificed to make life better for their children, and that is where we are today. Will we just sit and let G.E. walk away and not try to give our next generation a chance?

While the International Association of Machinists had the foresight to negotiate severance protections into the G.E. collective bargaining agreement, they will never replace a good job. The protections will not feed your children's families when there are no good jobs available for them. The protections will help to ease the pain of losing your livelihood, but they will not protect the American Dream for those coming behind us.

For those who are not ready to retire, the severance package will be a far cry from the paycheck and benefits that will be lost if the plant closes.

Please join us as we try to save these good jobs for our community. We have the opportunity to stand up and make a big difference in the future of Albuquerque, but we all have to get involved if we are going to be successful.

Ernest "Red" Dow is president and directing business representative for the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers Local Lodge #794.

Editor's note

The One-on-One feature interview will return next week.

LETTERS TO OUTLOOK

Economic irony

The impact of a mass layoff at the GE engine facility in Albuquerque's South Valley will hit the area's most skilled, most experienced and, ironically, most vulnerable citizens.

With an average age of 52 and more than 28 years on the job, the work force at GE Aviation would seem to be a prized commodity for any employer, in any economy.

Unfortunately, this economy no longer values decades of experience.

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Even with highly developed manufacturing skills, many of these workers in their 50s will never find another job that is the equal in pay, benefits or satisfaction to the positions they gave their prime years to.

Their loyalty to a single employer throughout their career is about to cost them and their families in the worst way at the worst possible time.

In an era when many families are a paycheck away from bankruptcy, many of these GE workers are the economic foundation of struggling family units that include aging parents, grown children and grandchildren, all living under the same roof.

At an age in life when financial obligations are supposed to be easing, these workers find their responsibilities increasing exponentially. It is a cruel irony that GE once referred to this facility as being ripe for closure due in part to the large number of employees who would be eligible for early retirement.

So rather than transitioning from a lifetime career to a comfortable and hard-earned retirement, many of these workers will never retire, competing instead with their own children for a succession of low paying, entry level jobs.

While pundits and politicians point to an economic recovery that only they can see, the real world continues to suffer: one good job, one good family, one good community at a time.

Happy Labor Day indeed.

Ernest "Red" Dow

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