

INDEPENDENT STEELWORKERS UNION

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Testimony by Mark Glyptis, President of the Independent Steelworkers Union, Weirton, West Virginia

Chairman English, members of the Congressional Steel Caucus, I thank you for once again inviting me to appear here before you to offer my views and ideas on steel related issues.

Two years ago I came before this group of distinguished members of Congress during a most disturbing time in my hometown of Weirton, West Virginia.

Weirton Steel Corporation, a 98-year-old steel producer had just filed for protection under Chapter 11 of the federal bankruptcy laws. We, the employees of Weirton Steel were in a state of confusion, uncertainty and fear. The company which we as employees had purchased from the National Steel Corporation in 1984 had failed and its future was unknown.

We survived those weeks and months of bankruptcy. But not without pain and suffering by thousands of retirees and active employees.

The Independent Steelworkers Union took on the leadership role of saving as many jobs as possible and preserving a steelmaking presence in Weirton, West Virginia. We successfully negotiated a new labor agreement with the International Steel Group that paved the way for that corporation to purchase the assets of the bankrupt Weirton Steel in federal bankruptcy court.

Since the purchase of the Weirton plant, the remaining 2,300 union and management employees have seen a return to profits. We have also seen a return of the "Weirton spirit" that allows us to work together to get the job done.

But while 2,300 jobs remain in Weirton, West Virginia, thousands of retirees and their spouses saw their hard earned pensions reduced and their health care benefits and life insurance eliminated through the bankruptcy process.

The phrase "can't afford to live and can't afford to die" was heard over and over as retirees came to our union hall searching for answers to why a 98 year old corporation was allowed to just file bankruptcy and walk away from pension and insurance obligations.

As members of the Congressional Steel Caucus, you are very much aware of the steel crisis during the past several years that has left nearly 50 North American steel companies in bankruptcy.

At the time of the ordering of the tariffs, President Bush called for a consolidation of the American steel industry. That consolidation has taken place and continues through today.

There is no doubt the number of American steel companies will decrease as the industry continues to downsize and grow even more efficient.

The Bush Administration provided us with a step in the right direction in recent days with the decision to continue and to expand the Steel Import Monitoring and Analysis System. That decision will allow the steel industry and the federal government the opportunity to avoid another crushing steel crisis.

But more must be done to protect our American steel industry from future attacks by foreign steel competitors intent on dumping their products in our markets and from those government agencies determined to rule our markets by legal blackmail.

The International Trade Commission recently conducted a Sunset Review hearing on continuing duties on certain hot-rolled steel products from Russia, Japan and Brazil. I have sent the ITC my views on the need to continue those duties and I would like to personally thank the members of the Congressional Steel Caucus who also provided written or oral testimony on that issue to the ITC.

But to be frank with you today, I am greatly disturbed by what I feel are blatant attempts by the World Trade Organization and its ally, the European Union, to determine what American laws are just and legal under their system.

I am referring to the so called Byrd Amendment, authored by Senator Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia.

The Congress has directed the Bush Administration to negotiate with the World Trade Organization and to settle the ongoing dispute regarding the Byrd Amendment. But the Administration appears more willing to sacrifice American laws in order to appease the World Trade Organization.

It is no secret that I have long opposed the United States membership in the WTO. I believe the WTO works hard and long to insure the trading partners of the United States maintain the upper hand in any trade dispute with our country. In fact, at times, the WTO appears ready to side openly with any country in dispute with the United States over any issue.

I would respectfully urge the Congressional Steel Caucus to join in those efforts to review our membership in the WTO. And failing an attempt to leave that organization, I would urge the Caucus to remind the Administration of the need to

It is frightening and sad to consider our very defense may depend on foreign steel producers and if they can make a profit selling steel to defense corporations in this country.

I would like to conclude with these thoughts today.

President Bush has embarked on a foreign policy to instill democracy in other lands. Members of his Administration speak proudly of democracy movements in the Middle East.

I agree with the need for democracy. I believe the United States is the greatest country in the world.

But I also believe a country that allows its retirees to face decisions on whether to eat or buy their medicine needs to wake up to reality. I believe a country that is ready to sell out its steel industry in order to appease a global organization for political reasons needs to wake up before its too late. And I believe a country that chooses to espouse freedom and democracy while financially aiding a country that practices child labor, ignores the basic rights of workers and freely pollutes the air and waterways must determine if we really are the country of the brave and the free.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear here today.