

12/19/08

Berl,

Please consider printing my response to Kyle Melinn's December 17 column [I got no response]:

I agree with Kyle Melinn (December 17) that it is unfair to include legacy costs when comparing the pay of UAW workers and non-union workers in southern-state foreign automaker plants. Including vacation, overtime, holidays, nights and weekend pay and break time and excluding legacy costs and fringe benefits, he figures that the UAW worker gets \$43 an hour compared to \$35 for the non-union auto worker. That \$8 difference, he says, is "the little extra bonus you get for unionizing". In other words, it was extorted fair and square. You have to keep in mind, however, that the workers at these non-union factories in the south are themselves overpaid. To keep the UAW at bay, the foreign automakers pay workers at least twice the market rate.

"Give back, give back, give back," Melinn says. That's all the UAW has done over the last six years, and additional concessions were offered to get the bridge loans needed to save the industry. However, they did not include giving up a penny of current workers' pay or benefits. In fact, the UAW's own website says that over the four years of the 2007 labor agreement with GM, the typical assembler will gain \$13,056. Big sacrifice.

I am always amazed at liberals' great compassion for the \$73,000 a year UAW worker and lack of sympathy for Michigan's 473,000 unemployed workers, most of whom would be happy to take those factory jobs "working around heavy machinery and hazardous chemicals, sucking in carcinogen-saturated air" for \$15 an hour plus health insurance. Maybe it has something to do with the fact that the UAW's political action committee spent \$1,828,556 on Michigan campaigns in the last year, surpassing all other independent PACs.

Factory workers may not be the only Big 3 employees who are overpaid. Salaries of white collar workers and managers probably exceed the market rate also. Certainly the CEOs aren't worth the millions they get. What does it take to be a CEO – working knowledge of a Blackberry and no criminal record?

Nobody should be paid more than the market rate, which is the lowest amount necessary to attract qualified people. Collective bargaining is a farce.

Steve Harry  
Lansing  
323-3897