

MR. OURSLER: My name is Barney Oursler. I'm co-Chair of the Mon Valley Unemployed Committee. Some days I think I'm an ambulance chaser, and other days it's more like driving a hearse, depending upon whether it's part of a plant that's closing or all of the plant that's closing. I got to follow to the Braddock Motor Coil plant that Jack Shea spoke of a few minutes ago and watched those jobs move to Mexico.

My organization began back in the '80s, the early '80s, when we watched 120,000 manufacturing jobs disappear from the SMSA region, the four county region around Pittsburgh. About 60,000 of those were steel jobs, 60,000 were other manufacturing jobs. And Mr. Weidenbaum is right, there are new jobs created. There were 30,000 jobs created in that same SMSA in that time period, almost exclusively service sector jobs, low paying jobs, jobs with very few, if any, benefits.

Now, that continues. Unfortunately, it's not just Braddock Motor Coil, but I'm spending time in Washington, PA watching the Washington Steel plant have its, I believe, fourth owner in five years; pieces of it dying every time a new owner comes in. I'm up in Erie where a General Electric plant watched part of its facility move to Mexico. I'm out in Charleroi where a steel worker plant -- watched some Corning Glassware move to Mexico. I spend far too much of my life

running around watching places close, and the good jobs that were gone are not replaced in any short-term answer, in any short-term way, and very seldom ever in the same community. But there are new jobs.

I also watch a lot of workers try to get to those new jobs. There are some programs out there that the labor movement managed to win, in the trade battles back in the '60s and '70s, an important program called Trade Adjustment Assistant Program. It's called the cadillac of training programs, because you not only get your choice of where you want to go to school -- someone doesn't tell you what you're going to become when you grow up, and it's kind of hard growing up at 55 years old -- but you at least have some choices, and you actually have unemployment checks continuing while you're in a training program.

But I watched several administrations at the state and federal level treat every single worker who tried to use that program with hostility, because they were far too well treated compared to the other federal retraining program, Job Training Partnership Act, which has a new name now with the same reality.

There are not the programs there to really help workers remake their lives. But then the problem isn't solved, because they are going to become new workers. A lot of workers, for example, in the Mon

Valley became health care workers. That was the growth industry back in the '80s in this region. It's now one of the places that people are losing jobs. And folks start off in the bottom of that industry, and at 40, 50, 60 years old getting a new job in a new industry is a very tough experience.

And, so we also, at the Mon Valley Unemployed Committee, have folks working on public policy issues as well. And I've been assigned for the last couple of years to something called the Western Pennsylvania Living Wage Campaign where we are working with a very small unionized effort, SEIU and the Steel Workers representing some of the very few workers organized in the mental health/mental retardation industry. We actually have several thousand workers that are contracted by Allegheny County and the city of Pittsburgh doing human services work that are very, very few unionized, and most of whom make about half of what union jobs they used to have and are also finding it very difficult to maintain insurance and other benefits for their families.

We think that public policy needs to indicate that -- or needs to establish that folks that work in this country have a right to take care of their family. We strongly urge Congress quit playing around with a \$1 an hour over two years or four years. Whether

you're a Democrat or Republican, that's what they're talking about doing to raise the minimum wage. The minimum wage needs to be a living wage. It needs to be nine bucks or ten bucks an hour, and it needs to also include access to health care.

We think that that standard needs to be established, and we're part of a national movement of living wage campaigns that has established that standard in about 45 different counties and cities around the country. We are part of a struggle here to do it in a large scale, and we think that part of that is to build coalitions of unions, churches, and community organizations that are real coalitions. We're doing that here.

We also have to educate people, because folks don't really understand why they've been left out of this great boom economy. They don't understand that the average working person has lost from 1980 through the mid-90s nine percent of their standard of living. They don't understand that they're working a month longer each year than we used to work as an average worker 20 years ago, a month longer each year. That reality is -- folks know that. We're doing the education here. We've had 4,000 people go through a 30-minute workshop, and, "Wow, it's not my fault. It's not that I'm stupid. It's not that I failed to get

enough education. This is what's happening to working people."

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER BECKER: Thank you, Barney.

Phillip Smith.