

## UNOFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT - MONDAY MAY 19, 2008 UAW President Ron Gettelfinger on News / Talk 760 WJR Radio

Here is an unofficial transcript of the interview between UAW President Ron Gettelfinger (R.G.) and Paul W. Smith (P.W.S.) about the American Axle tentative offer. Time stamps appear that correspond to the recording.

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P.W.S. Spoke with Ron Gettelfinger's office earlier. He was in a meeting. He was kind enough to call me back and I really do appreciate it. I don't know if I'd, ah, be able to talk to you before nine o'clock,. I know how busy you are Ron, ah, and I, ah, appreciate you checking in, even if you don't have a heck of a lot to tell us this morning at least about what's going on at American Axle. Good morning to you

0:290

R.G. Well, good morning Paul W.

P.W.S. The voting is today and Thursday as I, ah, see it in the news this morning.

R.G. Right, at, ah, Local 262, they're voting at their union hall today from 8 AM to 5 PM. And then 235 is voting at their union hall on Thursday, the 22nd from 3 AM to 7 PM. In the meantime, we have got , ah, staff from vice-president Jimmie Settles office, as well as the Local Union leadership's going to be available at Local 235 to answer any, ah, individual questions that our members may have in regards to the tentative agreement. They're going to be out there, ah, Monday today, ah, Tuesday the 20th, and Wednesday the 21st, from 9 AM to 5 PM, because we do recognize that, ah, there's a lot of questions that we didn't have the opportunity to answer yesterday. We stayed around for an hour or so after the meeting, and decided that this was the best approach for us to take on behalf of our membership.

1:36

P.W.S. Well, you, ah, ah, that's, you're putting it kind of mildly, because what we're getting is that there's a lot of anger. According, I'm going by the newspaper at this point. The anger - 'UAW members fear for the future. The impact, wages slashed, Michigan plant lost. The decision, Vote Set for today and Thursday.' That happens to be from the ah, Free Press, ah, front section. I, I got the Detroit News all cut up already. But, if, if the workers think, as one guy put it, 'It's a nightmare!' If, if the workers think it's so bad, help me understand the process here that, that you would say that you have a tentative agreement. Is this just to get off of the dime here that's been going on for weeks, and you want to give the workers a chance to, to say 'Yes' we like it, or 'No' we don't.

2:18

R.G. Well, that's right. We want input, ah, from the membership on the picketline. As you know they've been on the line since, ah February the 26th.

P.W.S.

More than eleven weeks I guess.

2:26

R.G. Right, and we have done everything in our power, up to this point in time, ah, to bring them back, ah, an agreement. But, the difference here Paul W. is we started at ground zero, if you will. And we've tried to build back. It's been tough negotiations. It's not, this is not an agreement that anybody is touting as 'This is great!' Absolutely not. It is not a good agreement. But at this juncture, it's the best we can do. We feel like we owe it to our membership, and to their families, ah to have negotiated to a point where we cannot make any more improvement, and then let them decide. It's simply in their hands now.

3:06

P.W.S. Well this seems like - Out of all the ones we've talked about, even though you thought some were going to be tight, ah, and close, ah, you don't have to answer this but my sense, my gut feeling is that you - Based on what you said to us last time we had you on, that you wouldn't be surprised if they didn't ratify this agreement. If they didn't vote to take it.

3:31

R.G. Well, it, it, in a situation like this there's a lot of emotion, and, what we want people to do is to make a decision, ah, not on anger, but on fact. And we've recognized that for each individual there's a different set of circumstances, and we just want them to weigh this agreement. Now I need to point out to you that the, ah, council, our council, the UAW American Axle Council, ah, voted to recommend the agreement to the membership. And we've took it in that vein, and presented it the membership. But now that's our recommendation from the council, it's the bargainers that were there, on the job every day. And I recognize that, that is, it's a hard decision for them to make. But they also know, since they've been involved in the day to day negotiations, they know how tough it's been there, and we come to the conclusion that it's time for our membership, ah, to have a vote. They either vote it up, or they it down. Then we go from there.

4:34

P.W.S. Well then - But it's, it's, possible Ron Gettelfinger that these workers are either going to vote it up and keep a job, or vote it down and watch the, any kind of job go to Mexico.

4:48

R.G. Well, ah, there's no question about that, but by the same token, some of them that'll be voting on it at, for instance, Tonawanda recognize that their facility's closing, Detroit 4 and 5, or what we refer to as The Forge, Tonawanda and Detroit 4 and 5, both of those are closing, so in, in reality there's a lot of, ah, job loss in this agreement, in addition to all of the other dramatic cuts that have been made in it.

5:16

P.W.S. But there are also some, when I look, if these are correct, and you don't have to tell me if they are or aren't, if everybody hasn't look at it yet, but if, if, there's a ratification bonus of \$5,000, buydowns as much as \$105,000, who stay, for those who stay, distributed annually over three years, exit package - buy-outs of \$85,000 for workers with fewer than ten years of seniority, 140,000 for those with more, early retirement bonus of \$55,000. If those are correct, if those are true, that sure beats a no vote, and then them saying 'Ok Well we've, we've closed the factory and we're going to Mexico.'

5:49

R.G. Well, Paul W. again this has been a very challenging and difficult set of negotiations. And a lot of things has broke in company's favor. There's no question about that. Ah, the high gasoline prices, the housing market crunch, the credit crunch, all of this stuff that's going on. The, the decline in the sale of the bigger vehicles that they supply to the customer, all those have went in the company's favor, and in reality, ah, this is a global economy catching up with us.

It's really a sad situation. But again, I have an obligation, ah, to do the very best job that can be done for our membership. Our bargaining committee has that same obligation and responsibility. That's what we've done. And Paul W., it, do we, do we, we've done the best we could at this point in time. So do we sit on it for two more weeks before we eventually come out to the membership? No. We did the best job we could. We got this thing, ah, as close as we could on Friday night, we worked very hard over the weekend getting it ready to roll out to the membership, and now we have put all the cards on the table. We have no hidden agenda from anybody, we have the entire booklets, every word that's scratched out of that contract book is available for people to see, ah, at the union hall. We are, as I indicated to you, we'll have, ah, four five six staff over there that'll be available to answer any question that anybody's got. Because this is dramatic, ah, change for workers, and we want our membership to understand - If they vote it down, that's fine. That's their choice to make. If they vote it up, that's okay too. That's their choice to make. But the thing that we want to try to do is just sit down, and let people express their concerns, and then get the straight forward answers, and then make an informed decision for themselves, and for their families as to what they wish to do.

7:48

P.W.S. Last quick question or note or observation - Dick Dauch was lauded and loved by his workers. It's gone way the other way it seems now. And isn't it possible for them to see that he's just trying to get a level playing field, trying to have the same opportunity that the other suppliers have with their deals that they have with you.

R.G. Well, you see Paul W. that's where you come into them being profitable. The fact that, ah, yo know he made over \$10,000,000 himself, he's got, ah, premium, ah, pricing with the customer, he's, he's got, ah, guaranteed margins if you will. I mean there's a lot of differences. You cannot compare this, ah, to other suppliers. There's a lot of ways, there's a lot of approaches that, that could have been taken to eventually got to where they're at as opposed to try to cram it down, ah people's throat. But from the outset, this company, ah, and with the full support of their board of directors, I might add, with the full support of their board have decided that this is the avenue they want to take. They shoved that agreement all the way down to the floor, and then said, "Now fight back for whatever you think you can get!" And, and again, it's not a good agreement, but it's the best we could do and that's why we've recommended it to the membership, and we'll let them decide.

9:04

P.W.S. All right, we appreciate you coming on board. I know how busy you are right now. Thanks very much Ron, we appreciate it, and we'll talk again soon.

R.G. Thank you Paul W.

9:17

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