

A steep decline in manufacturing jobs over the last decade has harmed millions of working families and their communities throughout the United States.

To keep strong, America must develop a national strategy to renew and rebuild manufacturing industries that provide good-paying jobs and a solid community tax base.

In early July, the USW hosted a presidential candidates' forum in Cleveland to hear what the candidates would do to revive American manufacturing.

More than 1,000 members from across the United States heard from four

who served as that state's U.S. Senator before becoming the Democrat's Vice Presidential nominee in 2004.

Biden, who credited a Steelworker endorsement for helping him to win his first Senate race in 1972, promised to be a "best friend" to the USW if elected and pledged to use the president's bully pulpit to promote organized labor.

Clinton said if she is elected, "We are actually going to appoint people who are pro-labor," while Kucinich promised to be a "labor president."

All of the candidates called for meaningful national health care reform and pledged to better enforce trade laws and

royalties from the oil industry.

Edwards, who has made eliminating poverty a hallmark of his campaign, pledged to raise the national minimum wage to \$9.50 an hour by 2012, and require that it automatically increase each year.

"No one should work full time in the United States of America and still live in poverty," Edwards said.

Enforce labor standards

Edwards, noting that his father worked for a textile mill that closed, said he would make sure trade agreements have real labor and environmental

USW Presidential Forum Candidates Pledge to Honor Union Agenda

JOE BIDEN



HILLARY CLINTON

JOHN EDWARDS



DENNIS KUCINICH

Democratic presidential candidates — Sen. Joseph Biden of Delaware, New York Sen. Hillary Clinton, former Sen. John Edwards of North Carolina and Rep. Dennis Kucinich of Cleveland. The members also participated in a concurrent forum on political activism.

Sen. Barack Obama and two other Democratic hopefuls did not attend, citing scheduling conflicts. The top Republican presidential candidates declined invitations to appear.

Unions welcomed

All four of the candidates present emphasized their ties to organized labor and said unions would be welcomed and encouraged during their administrations.

"We need a president who is not afraid to use the word 'union,'" said Edwards, the son of a North Carolina textile worker

toughen future trade agreements by including labor rights and environmental standards in the core language of the agreements. They all called for ending the war in Iraq.

Restore economy

"When we take back the White House we're going to... restore the economy and the opportunity that goes with it," Clinton said.

"We're going to work to make sure there is health care for everyone, work to create new good-paying jobs by dealing with energy and global warming and we're going to bring our troops home."

Clinton, who said she considers herself an honorary Women of Steel member, pledged to rebuild America's manufacturing base by, in part, funding new renewable energy with taxes and

standards that can be enforced.

"When I'm president and trade agreements land on my desk to be signed, I will not ever forget where I came from, what I have seen with my own eyes," he added.

Kucinich drew heavy applause from the union audience when he pledged to cancel the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), withdraw from the World Trade Organization and make sure new trade agreements have labor and environmental protections. He and Biden also proposed rebuilding bridges, water and mass transit systems.

"Isn't it time we had an American manufacturing policy where the maintenance of steel, auto, aerospace and shipping is seen as vital to our national security, our national defense," Kucinich said.

Liberian Workers Celebrate A New Day on the Firestone Plantation

This summer, workers employed on a Firestone rubber plantation in Liberia, West Africa took the first step in standing up to their oppressors when they chose new union leadership in the first democratic election held in their 80-year history.

Liberia was founded in 1847 by former American slaves and their descendants.

The settlers formed an elite ruling class in which native residents could not participate. In 1980, a military coup toppled the government and assassinated the president. A second coup occurred a

decade later followed by a civil war, which decimated the nation.

The rubber plantation did not escape the war. Lawlessness and desperation struck at all walks of life. Schools, hospitals and many other buildings were damaged or destroyed.

Order was restored in 2003 when the dictator Charles Taylor was removed and U.N. Forces took control and established a board of Liberian citizens to run the country until elections could be held.

During this period, union activists in Liberia requested assistance from the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center, an organization that provides technical assistance and support to workers and unions around the world. International President Leo W. Gerard is a board member.

The biggest concern of unionists in Liberia was the workers on the Firestone Plantation. So the Solidarity Center contacted the USW because we represent Bridgestone/Firestone workers in North America.

The USW responded by sending a fact-finding delegation to Liberia in 2005, led by then District 7 Assistant Director Fred Redmond and Harmon Lisnow of the Institute for Career Development (ICD). Lisnow had experience serving in Liberia with the Peace Corps.

Misguided tour

Arriving at the plantation, the delegation was taken on a guided tour by union representatives and management. Things did not appear as bad as they expected. But it soon became apparent that they were being restricted to areas that the company wanted them to see.

Later they were approached by a group that wanted them to experience what plantation life was really like. They set out at 4 a.m. and following local escorts, evaded guards to gain entry. They were shocked by what they saw.

Photo courtesy DeWitt Walton