

For immediate release

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Comments from U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd

“Stand Up for Steel” Rally

On a warm July day in 1992, presidential nominee Bill Clinton toured Weirton, West Virginia. The President walked through the steel mill and saw the pride that came from home and hard work. Mr. Clinton also heard about the threat that subsidized foreign steel posed to U.S. jobs. He said on that day, and I quote, “I want to first make sure we enforce strictly the anti-dumping laws, and the laws against unfair subsidized steel being dumped into this country. If they are doing things for their steel we are not doing for ours, they should not have access to our markets.”

Last night, in his State of the Union address, President Clinton said that this country “must enforce our trade laws when imports unlawfully flood our nation.” He said that “we have got to put a human face on the global economy.” Mr. President, I offer you the faces of the thousands of steelworkers here and across the country who are out of a job because of this global economy. I see the faces of American steel workers. I hope that President Clinton will see their humanity. I think it is time for this Administration not only to talk the talk, but also to walk the walk.

What we want is not complicated. We want help for our steel companies. We want

support for our steel families. Steel helped to form the backbone of this country, from the girders that are part of the skyscrapers in our cities to the bridges and tunnels that let commerce flow. Steel was molded into engines that powered the United States into the Industrial Revolution. Steel provides the weaponry with which our soldiers and sailors defend this nation.

But today, U.S. steel faces a threat that it cannot overcome on its own. What started as a trickle of foreign subsidies and steel imports has turned into a tidal wave that threatens to wash away jobs and entire communities in its wake.

Foreign companies are dumping steel in America below cost. Those foreign companies are hurting American families and destroying American jobs. This must end now.

I have always been skeptical of the willingness of any Administration -- Democratic or Republican -- to implement fair trade policies. Trade policy seems to be dictated more by State Department goals than by the needs of the American people at home. But job losses in America must not be the price we pay to expand job opportunities elsewhere around the globe. Unfair trade practices by foreign competitors must not put American jobs on the line.

Two-and-a-half weeks ago, when the White House released its plan for handling this steel crisis, this Administration had its opportunity to prove it was different from past Administrations. I was hoping for strong, decisive action. Instead, what did we get? We got nothing more than hopeful words and financial crumbs. I grew up in a poor family. I long ago learned one thing -- like Lazarus at the rich man's table, crumbs don't go far when the stomach is hungry, and words can never fill an empty wallet.

The headlines in Weirton have been echoed in Philadelphia, Detroit, St. Louis, and Chicago.

Hundreds laid-off.

Families struggle to survive.

Steel mill faces closing.

Yet this Administration would rather stand aside to protect the global economy while America's once-proud steel towns crumble. This Administration would rather stand aside to help save jobs in Asia while American jobs drown in a sea of cheap steel from abroad! This Administration stands aside while foreign steel floods into this country and washes away families and communities.

We have a message for this Administration: You may stand aside, but we in the Congress will stand up tall for steel.

In the last 24 hours, Senator Specter, Senator Rockefeller, Senator DeWine, and I have introduced legislation aimed at finding a way to shut down the tidal wave of imports and put thousands of laid-off steelworkers back to work. Thank you all of being here today. Let us work together to put the pride back into our steel communities.

I have fought for American workers for 50 years -- American coal miners, American steelworkers -- those who earn their bread by the sweat of their brow. I was fighting just this morning and I'll keep on fighting. I will always stand tall for steel.

We will keep coming back, we will keep fighting, and keep the faith that you have placed in us by standing tall for U.S. workers, U.S. families and U.S. communities first.