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## **President Obama, Please Give Delphi Workers a Fair Shake**

*Weekly Column from U.S. Senator Rob Portman*

Every American is supposed to get a fair shake from the federal government. The government works for us, after all. Every citizen should be treated fairly without regard to associations, connections, status or political party.

Sadly, however, the shadow of unfair treatment hangs over what happened to the hard-working salaried retirees of the auto parts company Delphi as part of the bailout of its former parent General Motors. And the White House is doing nothing to help, not even letting them know what really happened -- and why.

Like many Americans, the 22,000 salaried retirees of Delphi earned their pensions with hard work and by playing by the rules over the course of their careers. In exchange, each month during their retirement they were to be paid a certain benefit.

Yet in the summer of 2009, as it took GM into bankruptcy, the Obama Administration terminated their pensions.

The details are murky because the Obama Administration is withholding information that would shed light on the matter. But what is not murky is that the Delphi retirees' careful financial planning went out the window when they were suddenly told they would only be getting a fraction of what was promised to them.

About 5,000 Delphi salaried retiree families throughout Ohio, from the Mahoning Valley to Dayton, had their retirement income slashed by this decision, which came on top of the loss of all promised health care and life insurance.

What is most troubling is that there may have been a potentially illegal political determination behind this decision. At the very same time these salaried employees had their pensions chopped, some of their hourly colleagues had their pensions "topped up" by GM to the full amount owed them by Delphi.

Delphi salaried retirees in Ohio are struggling to pay bills they had budgeted for under their full pensions, such as their children's college tuition. In too many cases, they are fighting tooth and nail to stave off declaring bankruptcy.

And yet down the same Ohio streets, in the same Ohio communities, many of their colleagues who sat next to them at work are getting the full pensions they were promised.

At a time of high chronic unemployment, which makes it harder for these retirees to reenter the workforce, it certainly is important that Washington not make it more difficult for these folks to get by.

I helped put together an agreement earlier this Congress that increased the coverage level of the Health Coverage Tax Credit. This is a vital tool that helps American workers, including these former Delphi employees, afford health insurance once the federal government has taken over their pension plans. They had no say in the matter, after all.

This helps temporarily, but is not a solution.

As the first histories of what happened to the Delphi workers are being written by government watchdogs and journalists, disturbing new information is coming out.

The White House has insisted that politics played no role in the decisions to terminate the Delphi salaried pensions, and these were made entirely by the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC), the so-called independent federal agency in charge of pensions. But e-mails between members of President Obama's Auto Task Force and the PBGC show that the Auto Task Force played a big role, and that some of its members' previously given testimony may be inaccurate.

The government watchdog for the money used for the GM bailout has been investigating this question for a long time, and their major report on the issue is set to come out shortly. The investigators previously indicated that "the refusal by three former Treasury officials on the Auto Team to provide information ... is preventing us from completing our audit." The investigators need to get to the bottom of it and I will continue to work with colleagues from both sides of the aisle to fight for impartial treatment for these middle-class Ohio workers.

They worked hard and played by the rules. They deserve answers from the Obama Administration. They deserve a fair shake.

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<http://portman.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2012/10/weekly-column-president-obama-please-give-delphi-workers-a-fair-shake>