From the Vice President’s Desk

Refinery Workers’ Jobs at Stake if Congress Lifts Ban on U.S. Crude Oil Exports

Brothers and sisters, it seems like every time we turn around we have to defend our jobs. But if we don’t fight back against the lifting of the crude oil export ban we could see our jobs go over to China, India or Saudi Arabia. Each of those countries has new, large refineries that were built in the past few years and are capable of exporting gasoline and other oil products we make.

The House Energy and Commerce Committee voted Thursday, Sept. 17 to allow our crude oil to be exported (H.R. 702). The vote largely was along party lines. All the Republicans voted in favor of the bill, however, three House Democrats—Rep. Gene Green (Texas-29th district, which includes Houston, Pasadena and Baytown), Rep. Kurt Schrader (Ore.-5) and Tony Cardenas (Calif.--29)—voted in favor as well. Many of you helped Rep. Green get re-elected repeatedly.

Who Wants Oil Export Ban Lifted

Republicans largely support lifting the oil export ban, including Republican House Speaker John Boehner. He will still be around to vote on lifting the ban before he leaves the end of October.

The 15-member Blue Dog Coalition—a group of fiscally conservative Democrats—announced earlier in September their support to lift the oil export restrictions. Eight members of this group cosponsored (H.R.702). These folks tend to believe “free-trade” exists and ignore how China and other countries routinely cheat to gain trade advantage.

Rep. Jim Cooper (TN-5, Nashville area), Rep. Jim Costa (CA-16) and Kurt Schrader (Ore.-5) chair the Blue Dog Coalition. To see the complete list of the coalition’s members go to http://bluedogcaucus-schrader.house.gov/members.

Recently, U.S. Senate Democrats unveiled a comprehensive energy bill that could be used to bargain with Republicans to end the ban.

Democrats from oil-producing states—like Sen. Heidi Heitkamp (D) from North Dakota who introduced a Senate bill to lift the export ban (S. 1312) with Republican Senator Lisa Murkowski from Alaska—are pushing to let the U.S. export its crude oil to other countries like India and China.

Who Wants to Keep Oil Export Ban

Many Democrats are concerned that lifting the ban will increase the cost of gasoline. In fact, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) noted that some stakeholders have highlighted the potential that lifting the export ban could increase prices and threaten refineries in the Midwest and Northeast.

In addition to the cost of gasoline, other Democrats express the same concerns as we do about what will happen if the oil export ban is lifted. Sen. Ed Markey (D-Mass.), Sen. Al Franken (D-Minn.) and 11 other Democratic U.S. senators recently signed a letter to Pres. Barack Obama expressing their concern that lifting the oil export ban could harm consumers, businesses and our national security.

We Can’t Let Up

Our union is fighting hard against lifting the crude oil export ban. In Washington, D.C. our USW Legislative Department is tirelessly contacting representatives, senators and their staffs to explain why lifting the ban is harmful to our refinery jobs, consumers and country.

USW International President Leo W. Gerard also testified before the U.S. Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee at the end of July and wrote letters to
the House and Senate to warn them of the consequences of lifting the ban.

Our Legislative and New Media Departments worked together to create a top 10 list of key reasons to keep the export ban in place. New Media also created and retained the rotating panel on the USW homepage that urges readers to sign the letter to Congress, which urges the legislators to not lift the oil export ban.

From Pittsburgh, our Rapid Response Department sent out action and information alerts to every local. So far, USW members have generated over 45,000 letters asking Congress to retain the crude oil export ban. Many non-refinery locals sent these letters in solidarity with the refinery workers.

More Action Needed Now

Our legislative department estimates the House will take a vote the week of Sept. 27, 2015 to lift the export ban. There is also talk of attaching the bill lifting the ban to other legislation, so we will have to remain vigilant in tracking the bill.

Democrats in the Senate will be watching how their Democratic colleagues in the House vote, so it’s extremely important that you call your Representatives NOW to urge them not to lift the crude oil export ban. You can use the 10 reasons to retain the ban that are listed on our oil webpage—http://www.usw.org/union/mission/industries/oil—and the oil Facebook page—https://www.facebook.com/OilBargaining.

To find out who your representative is, go to http://www.house.gov/representatives/find/ and then call them toll-free at 1-866-202-5409.

After you call your representative, call your senator because they will be voting on (S.1312), which also would lift the crude oil export ban.

To look up your senator, go to https://www.opencongress.org/people/zipcodelookup and call them toll-free at 1-866-202-5409.

While President Obama stated he opposes the House bill, he thinks the Commerce Department should make the decision to lift the crude oil export ban.

Whether the House, the Senate or the Commerce Department want to consider lifting the oil export ban, we have to oppose it and let them know why we oppose it.

Even the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) report says our refiners would lose money to the tune of $22 billion a year in refining profits. U.S. producers could gain additional revenue of $29 billion. The report said lifting the ban would cut the gap between domestic and global light crude prices, while gasoline prices at the pump would either be unchanged or slightly lower.

If this report is correct in its analysis, is it really worth it to pay a few cents less for gasoline while shutting down our U.S. refineries and laying off thousands of refinery workers?

Tell that to your representative or senator, even if they support lifting the ban. Do they really want to be responsible for laying off thousands of refinery workers and others whose livelihood depends upon the refineries operating? I doubt they even thought about that.

Again, call your representative or senator NOW at 1-866-202-5409. Your job and your family’s well-being depend on it!

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