Machinists President R. Thomas Buffenbarger and Vice President Richard P. Michalski present K

I am proud to be here today with Members of a great union. You know what it takes to build a strong America, with a strong middle class. To President Tom Buffenbarger, let me say I appreciate the fact you don't mince words. I always know what you mean. This stands in stark contrast to Congress, in which I work, where so often when someone finishes their remarks, you don't know whether they are for or against what they have just spoken about.

I am honored to be here this morning on behalf of every human being who has gathered the courage to stand up and say: "My work has worth." The value of the work I do -- both mind and body—deserves full legal standing as a "right of contract." It should not be casual, nor day labor, nor bonded, nor at will…but by law.

This bold passage to a brave, new consciousness of the worth of human work, sadly, does not belong to all people. But it should.

The struggle for labor rights has been noble. And it has been grizzly. It is global in dimension. It always has been. Just ask the descendants of slaves. Recently, in Congress, as another Nafta-like trade agreement -- this time for Peru --was being shoved down our throats, the miners of Peru struck from Monday to Wednesday. They did all they could do send a message to Congress to defeat that agreement. Some in Congress heard their call. A majority did not. Now, there is another Nafta-like agreement proposed for Columbia that is being held in suspension for a vote in Congress. But we don't know when because of the approaching elections. Yet over 30 labor leaders of Columbia have been assassinated this year already.

Labor's struggle holds hope that there is a way for us to attain the promised land in this life, not the next. The struggle for labor reminds me of the words from the Broadway Musical Les Miserables; "Will you join in my parade, will you be strong and stand with me, it is the music of a people who will not be slaves again." Once I took a businessman to that show on Broadway and afterwards we had dinner. He asked me: "What was that story all about?" I don't get it." He had no consciousness.

A few weeks ago, an elderly woman in my church came up to me and lamented "Marcy, our

country doesn't belong to us anymore. Go back to Washington, and keep fighting!!"

Her family you see had experienced middle class job outsourcing, and loss of health insurance. She would be uplifted to know we are here today to join our voices for her family and America's working families.

Kaptur addresses the IAM Legislative Conference.

Let's call her "Mrs. America." Mrs. America understands our nation's standard of living is at stake when a fine company like Maytag shuts down in Newton, Iowa and moves production to Mexico and Singapore. Thousands of Americans were out of work just because Lester Crown thinks he should earn billions more off a cheapened product and cheap labor. He hurt America. Maytag was a great product and it helped our nation's productivity including by lifting the burden off women who had to do most of that laundry in the past.

Mrs. America understands our nation's standard of living is at stake when the Bush Adm awards a major Dept. of Defense contract to a firm from a foreign country that is non union and puts its footprint down in a right to work state. Let me assure you, as a member of the Defense Appropriations subcommittee of the U.S. House, when that proposal comes before us this year, my vote will be Buy America and Build America.

Thank you Tom, and Rich and your officers for arranging meetings for me in Newton, Iowa at Maytag so I could meet and film the workers and engineers to tell the story of the people who built one of the America's greatest products for a century. The visit was poignant and unforgettable. What happened there and in Galesburg, Illinois never should have.

But let me tell you the other half of the story. A few months after visiting Iowa, I found myself travelling to Monterrey, Mexico to seek justice in the murder of a Mexican Farm labor organizer --Santiago Cruz-- who had been trained in my district. Santiago had returned to his country to inform farm laborers there they did not have to pay bounty hunters and coyotes $10,000 to come to this country to work in our fields. They could come as contract workers if no American wanted the job and they could do so legally and without fear. Santiago had been travelling to

fields and work camps explaining to workers that they could come as contract workers. Santiago was 28 years of age, and was beaten to death, while tied to a chair on the second floor the tiny farm labor office located next to a Catholic Church were workers could rest safely and get food before their journey to our country.

As we were driving on the main highway to our officials meetings with the Mexican Attorney General of Nuevo Leon, the state in which Monterrey is located, our taxi drove by a huge new manufacturing complex whose signs read: MAYTAG, WHIRLPOOL, AMANA, and across the street, AMWAY. I yelled out: Stop the car! I took photos and reflected on the meetings I had had with Maytag workers as I witnessed firsthand this replacement facility.

Our officials meetings have yielded no prosecutions, and no justice in a nation that has no rule of law. Two weeks after my visit down there, I called the Attorney General to inquire about progress in the case. I learned he had to step down from his position due to suspected drug trafficking.

People suffer. Workers suffer. The idea of democracy suffers in a country like that. When America was founded, slaves were brought here and treated like property to be disposed of by the owners. Now, machines are moved to where workers have no rights, and Wall Street politely calls its “globalization.”

Booker T. Washington reminded us “there are two ways of exerting one’s strength: “one is pushing down,” (and how well we know that technique in the Congress), “the other is pulling up.”” Today, your presence, your achievements, your fight are America’s fighting chance. You are pulling up workers, pulling up the rule of law, pulling up democracy.

Mrs. America would be proud of you

And she would be the first to say America needs you now more than ever.

Thank you.