

Retool Auto Industry To Solve Detroit Crisis

LaMar Lemmons III, a Democrat, represents District 3 in the Michigan House of Representatives, which lies in the heart of the city of Detroit. On May 18 he introduced House Concurrent Resolution 0013 (2005), joined by 19 other representatives, calling on the U.S. Congress to intervene to rescue the automobile industry now facing imminent bankruptcy (see text in EIR, May 27). He first



served in the House from 1999 to 2002; during that term he introduced a resolution to save D.C. General Hospital, the only public hospital in the nation's capital. He was re-elected to the House in 2004. He has been politically active in Detroit his entire life, having served as Youth Director of the Inner City Community Center and a counselor of the homeless for Operation Get-Down, among many other civic activities. He is the former special assistant to Wayne County Executive Ed McNamara, and former legislative analyst for Speaker Curtis Hertel. In 2003, he sponsored a Town Hall meeting in Detroit, inviting Lyndon LaRouche, then a candidate for the Democratic nomination for President, to be the keynote speaker.

Lemmons was interviewed on June 8 by Mary Jane Freeman, on his reasons for introducing the May 18 Resolution on the automobile industry crisis and the related budget crisis in the city of Detroit.

EIR: Can you describe for us who your constituents are in District 3, and what kind of living and working conditions exist there today?

Lemmons: Okay, it's the east side of the city of Detroit, and conditions are rather bleak for many of the citizens of the third district. Historically, we had many factories, and an opportunity to work, and now the unemployment rate in the city is somewhere around 20%, for African-American males. My district's demographics are about 95% African-American. It is heavily Democratic, in terms of voting, and most of the schools in the area are eligible for free lunch, which means they are at the poverty level.

A large percentage of the constituents that have chosen to remain are retirees from the auto factories. But they were not able to pass those jobs on up to their children and grandchild-

dren. And unfortunately, many of them, because of the quality of education, coupled with a general mindset that they could always depend on making a good living from the auto factory, a lot of the people were not prepared for this shift in the economy.

EIR: You said you represent about 100,000 constituents, but that you actually service more than that.

Lemmons: Each House district is approximately 100,000, but my father is also a state representative, due in large part to my efforts to see that he secured that seat, and he has the same name as I do, LeMar Lemmons, but he is Jr. He serves the adjacent district. I actually service the Democrats of District 1, as well.

EIR: Was that area of the district once serviced by inner-city rail? I know you used to have trolleys that ran in Detroit.

Lemmons: In the 1920s the city had the trolleys, but by the 1940s, World War II, they were gone. Remember, we became the Motor City right after that, and we began large-scale production, car manufacturing after that. There was more of a commitment to build highways, than there was mass transit. So this is one of the few areas of the country with no real mass transit, with a very inadequate and inefficient bus line system.

EIR: On June 7, the CEO of General Motors announced that GM will cut another 25,000 hourly jobs over the next three years. Lyndon LaRouche, *EIR*'s founding editor, denounced the move, and said that the failure of the United States Congress to intervene, to save the nation's auto industry, its skilled workforce, and their families, which he had called for back on April 13, can no longer be tolerated. And he said: "We must get them to act. People's lives and families are on the line, it's immoral to oppose intervention. It would be dishonorable to do anything else." Do you agree, and what will be the impact of these—

Lemmons: First of all, I agree whole-heartedly with the sentiments of Mr. LaRouche on the effects the impending layoffs will have; they will devastate the state economy, and that also of course includes the government, and government services which depend on the tax revenues coming from those jobs. Also, we're hoping for some kind of rescue plan for General Motors similar to that which Chrysler had. Also we will have to do something with bilateral trade. And I think Mr. LaRouche is the only person, the only national politician I know, who is addressing the issue of the economy in a serious fashion, as far as I'm concerned.

EIR: This has been brewing. On Feb. 26 the leading Swiss financial daily's headline "Thunderstorm Over Detroit," led LaRouche, four days later, March 3, to ask, "When will GM and GMAC go? Who will refinance this bubble, this debt swindle?" No one else at that time rang an alarm bell. He then

in mid-April called for emergency action by the U.S. Senate to intervene with Federal resources, to save the auto sector, save its machine tool capacity, skilled work force, etc., retool the industry to begin making components for badly needed infrastructure.

On May 18, you followed suit, initiating House Concurrent Resolution 0013, which I believe was joined by 19 others, including one Republican, that echoed LaRouche's call, and your resolution says: "to take every possible action to promote and diversify the automotive and machine sectors of our national economy." Can you tell us where that resolutions stands today, and what needs to be done to get it moving?

Lemmons: It is in the Commerce Committee, and I had my Chief of Staff talk to the members from that Committee, and they have other pressing issues, so it is not a priority to move this resolution, according to them. They are dealing with other budgetary matters. They did say, that however, perhaps—but not giving me a date and time—that they may take it up without notice.

EIR: And this is a concurrent resolution, which means that the Senate would also have to act on it?

Lemmons: I decided to make it a concurrent resolution to show the importance, and immediacy, and the sense of urgency, that Congress must act.

EIR: On June 1, the Wayne County Commission—which incorporates the city of Detroit, I believe—passed a 13-0 resolution which follows basically in the footsteps of the one you introduced calling for the Congress to act.

Lemmons: Yes. In Wayne County we have 15 County Commissioners—one is a Republican, Laura Cox—so we were able to move that. I did know about it, I talked to the chair of the Wayne County Commission, and she assured me that she would move it, as well as the sponsor, which was Mr. Cavanaugh, who is the son of the former mayor of the city of Detroit in 1960.

EIR: This is an important organizing initiative, because one of the things that LaRouche said today, being briefed on other, new developments, is that we have to initiate the positive solutions to the policy crises, right now. We have to box in the Bush Administration, and others, who are refusing to act on the economy, jobs, infrastructure, health care, that is, the issues that are facing the American people. So to create a

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groundswell with institutions like the State Legislature, the County Commissions, the Democratic Clubs, you name it, to create that groundswell is exactly the kind of thing to move forward with, so this is excellent.

Lemmons: I will be introducing these in the 13th Congressional District Democratic Organization as well, to have them put forward a resolution, and I will take the resolution to the Detroit City Council, and get a sponsor to send a resolution to the State Legislature urging them to do the same.

EIR: Let's move on to the situation, what I call the high-stakes budget battle going on in the city of Detroit right now. As I understand it, Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick estimates that there is a \$300 million deficit for the next Fiscal Year, which begins on July 1, and that he and the City Council have proposed competing budget plans. The Council rejected his plan; he vetoed the Council's plan, and in turn they overrode his veto. What's the situation and implications for Detroit of this budget crisis?

Lemmons: Well, besides the inside-the-baseball-park, which is mostly personality-driven, rather than substance-driven, which is what you have in any type of local body, the essence of it is that City Council said the Mayor didn't cut enough, and that they didn't believe that his projections were accurate, and that the city was in even more dire straits than he projected, and therefore it was not a balanced budget. They are actually in negotiations now, as we speak, as to what things would ultimately be cut. But the reality is the city of Detroit doesn't have the money to sustain itself much longer; there's been talk of receivership. As things continue, we still may be two or three years away from receivership, but we're in that downward trajectory.

EIR: I think the issue of not having the money goes right to the heart of why your resolution in the legislature is critical. I'll just read a quote from City Council President Mahaffey, which I think gets at the crux of the matter: "Fifty years of disinvestment in the city, national housing and highway policies that subsidize suburbanization, the State's fiscal problems, and the profound challenges faced by General Motors and Ford, have all coalesced to create a financial storm that has engulfed the city."

Now *EIR* uniquely documented that takedown and destruction of the city of Detroit, a year ago, in a feature article: the depopulation, the shutting down of housing, and that kind of thing. So the issue of whether or not the city will have the money is a question of whether or not the United States Senate acts to restart the economy, starting right at home with General Motors and Ford, I would think.

Lemmons: I would concur with those sentiments. Additionally, on the retooling and the lack of an urban policy, I would concur with the Councilwoman Mahaffey that it is the confluence of the perfect storm of fiscal collapse, and we are in the midst of it now. And what has to happen is, we're going

to have to have Federal intervention in terms of starting the economy. The local end itself, does not have the ability to do what my resolution suggests.

EIR: Since the tax base of the city has clearly been wiped out by the policies of deindustrialization which have impoverished people and killed their hopes and dreams, it seems now is the time to say "enough" and to organize a groundswell, as you just indicated you are doing, to get LaRouche's policies put forward to retool and rebuild. What are the projects that need to be built in Detroit?

Lemmons: The city of Detroit needs brownfield development; Detroit needs the entire range of infrastructure projects: the sewer lines need to be redone, roads. We still need a mass-transit system with some type of rail. We don't have any type of mass-transit system like Washington, or New York, or Chicago. So the city of Detroit is in dire need of all types of infrastructure development, new lighting systems, new power generation, all the things that we've had before, water purification systems—we could go on and on. Housing restoration and development. And schools: The average school in Detroit is about 80 years of age.

EIR: You've said that you've lost 30 schools in the last few years?

Lemmons: No. We're scheduled to close 30 schools come the Fall, and that's just the beginning.

EIR: I understand you're starting a new campaign. I want to know what you are running for, and why you are doing it, and what the time frame is on that.

Lemmons: I am a candidate for the Detroit City Council, and we will be kicking off sometime around July 9. The primary election is Aug. 2. I am coming home, to bring some of the expertise that I have acquired working in the legislature all these years. If I'm successful in the primary, I will campaign for the Nov. 3 election.

EIR: How many candidates are running?

Lemmons: There are 144 of our finest citizens who are also disgruntled. We are running for one of nine seats.

EIR: In light of GM and Ford cutting production over the Summer months—immediate scaling back—and the just-announced layoffs, and the city of Detroit facing this budget crisis, which can obviously only get worse, as we have just discussed, what's your message to your U.S. Senators, Carl Levin and Debbie Stabenow? What should they be doing?

Lemmons: They need to take action on the resolution, and move toward retooling. In fact, they, as our Senators, and the entire Michigan Congressional delegation, should embrace, in a bipartisan fashion, the resolution to retool and re-industrialize, and put America back to work, and listen to Lyndon LaRouche's economic forecasts.