

Rosemary Bezy and Patricia M. DeMarco: Who will stand with Mon Valley steelworkers and communities?

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It has been more than two months since U.S. Steel announced that it was investing \$3 billion in Osceola, Ark., to build an advanced steelmaking facility, and not one regional leader has said a word about this situation.

Our political leaders seem to want to avoid questions about how we ended up here: the abandonment of Mon Valley communities and their highly skilled, unionized manufacturing workforce. U.S. Steel will shift its investments to a right-to-work state where it will employ 600 nonunion workers to replace the same steelmaking capacity of the Mon Valley, where 3,500 workers face an uncertain future — all while U.S. Steel also starts selling off its pension obligations.

The silence insults the generations of workers who sacrificed their health and their lives to build the infrastructure of our country and the historic prosperity of our region.

We, the authors, represent a broad coalition of steelworkers, retired steelworkers and multigenerational descendants of steelworkers who contributed to this essay, and to the vision it lays out. We know the importance of good-paying union jobs. We support community and worker health, clean air, clean water and a clean environment — not just for us, but for our children and future generations.

U.S. Steel's actions feel like calculated, abusive manipulation setting the stage for further abandonment, all facilitated by silent cynical "leadership."

Unfortunately, we are familiar with this kind of treatment. We are living through the latest episode in U.S. Steel's more than 50-year history of broken promises, a slow-motion exit from their professed "home" and "family" in the Mon Valley. It's a process that traces at least back to when the company spent \$6.4 billion in 1981 to acquire Marathon Oil instead of investing in Mon Valley facilities as promised.

The pattern today is strikingly similar: promise to invest, then back out and invest elsewhere while abandoning the Mon Valley and its union workers.

It's time to go in a different direction. We want investments in the Mon Valley and its world-class, highly skilled workforce. We support high-tech manufacturing for the future. And we are proposing a plan that unites workers and communities can build from:

1. A vision centering on improving the health of communities and workers, with leadership and reliable, good-faith partners that keep promises.
2. A commitment respecting residents' and workers' rights to clean air and water and a healthy environment.
3. Investments in people: workers and communities, not in corporations that harm communities.
4. Reliable family-sustaining jobs in industries — whether steel or not — that help, not hurt, their local communities.
5. Solutions addressing short-term air pollution problems and long-term climate necessities lacking in past and current proposed plans for the Mon Valley.

If U.S. Steel refuses to invest in its facilities and continues on its road of abandonment, our county and state government should step in to broker an agreement with a new entity that will move us all into the future. They

did it for the Pirates and Penguins; why not for steelworkers and our communities?

We want to see a major manufacturer embrace this golden opportunity: Be part of the solution. Heal the community from past abandonment. Clean up the environmental mess. Do right by loyal union workers. Build America's next-generation industries through advanced technology and innovation.

If not a modern steel operation run on renewable energy, then modernized manufacturing can replace declining industries with next-generation products such as electric vehicles, energy storage systems, solar and wind systems and making alternatives to single-use plastics. Pittsburgh is one of the centers of green chemistry and circular materials production systems, a wide-open manufacturing opportunity.

What we need is to revive the collaborative spirit that built America. We must take the lessons of our past and reshape our communities, workforce, institutions and regulations for a better future that works for all of us. We can restore the health of our communities and empower our people with, above all, equitable and inclusive business practices.

We want a just transition for workers and distressed communities. This requires retraining, retooling and reassurances that new jobs will provide the same or better level of family-sustaining pay, benefits and security.

The emerging clean economy needs the skills we already have here in the Mon Valley. Good union jobs can be at the heart of the transformation of our economy. A better future is within reach if we are willing to come together and demand it.

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