

# BY **JOHN MCCAIN**

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**A** little more than a month ago, I visited Wilmington to discuss the possible closure of the DHL hub and its potentially devastating impact on local communities. I met with business and labor leaders, elected officials from both parties, and I met with families worried about what will happen to them if the deal goes through. I saw the anguish and anger in their faces, and I also saw that this is not an issue that should ever be exploited for political gain. This is about keeping Americans from losing their community, which is why I promised those leaders and families that I would do all I could to make sure that jobs stay in southwestern Ohio.

Since then, the situation has deteriorated. DHL refuses to rethink its decision—refuses even to meet with affected workers. It plans to go ahead with this disastrous closing without seriously considering the plight of the thousands of hardworking Ohioans who are bracing for unemployment, the loss of health insurance, and snowballing debt. This situation is unacceptable. Federal action—together with state and local efforts—is needed to either stop this deal if it is unlawful, or, in the worst-case scenario, to help displaced workers find new jobs as quickly as possible.

The background to this situation is familiar to the working families of southwestern Ohio. DHL and its predecessors have owned the Wilmington Air Park for 30 years. This year, DHL's parent, German company Deutsche Post World Net, announced a plan to contract with rival carrier UPS to provide air transportation for North American shipments for the next decade. Should this happen, most or all of the Wilmington facility would likely close. ABX Air in particular would suffer major job losses, since DHL is by far its largest customer. All told, some 8,000 jobs would be lost as a

direct result of DHL's outsourcing plan, and as many as 40,000 jobs could be lost as a result of the deal's repercussions in the broader community.

I am deeply concerned about the effects of this deal on working families in southwestern Ohio—families who are already struggling with the economic turbulence jolting our nation. At this critical time in our nation's history, when the housing market is in crisis, health-care and college costs are soaring, and the price of gasoline is strangling family budgets, the last thing we need is for employers who have made commitments to local communities to leave workers stranded in economic ghost towns.

During my trip to Wilmington last month, I met with families that stand to lose everything if DHL packs up and leaves Ohio. These families have worked hard to save for the future. They have dreamed for years of college diplomas for their children and comfortable retirements down the road. They believed that DHL was committed to their community—that DHL's operations in Ohio were not just about the bottom line, but about



a bond between the community and the company that would transcend short-term financial considerations. And with justification: The state of Ohio, city of Wilmington, and county of Clinton spent over 400 million dollars in taxpayer money to keep the Wilmington hub open, and the State has worked to improve transportation infrastructure in the area on the assumption that the DHL plant there would provide jobs for decades to come.

Now these working families' dreams are imperiled because DHL has given too little regard to the personal implications of its decision.

We all know that in a free-market economy, job losses are a reality, and sometimes they cannot be avoided. But the process by which DHL

made the choice to close the Air Park betrays a fundamentally mistaken view of how to go about making such consequential and potentially devastating decisions. Workers were barely consulted, and no consideration was given to the seismic impact of the closure on the surrounding communities.

After my trip to Wilmington, I immediately sent a letter (co-signed by Rep. Mike Turner) to Frank Appel, the Chairman of DHL's parent, inviting him to come to Wilmington and visit with affected workers before making a decision. I told him that it was important that he hear first-hand about the concerns of members of this community before outsourcing all of the jobs away.

Dr. Appel's response was unsatisfactory, to put it mildly. He called DHL's plan "unavoidable and irreversible." He said that he would visit Wilmington only after the deal goes through—when such a meeting would do no good. He basically gave ABX Air employees the cold shoulder.

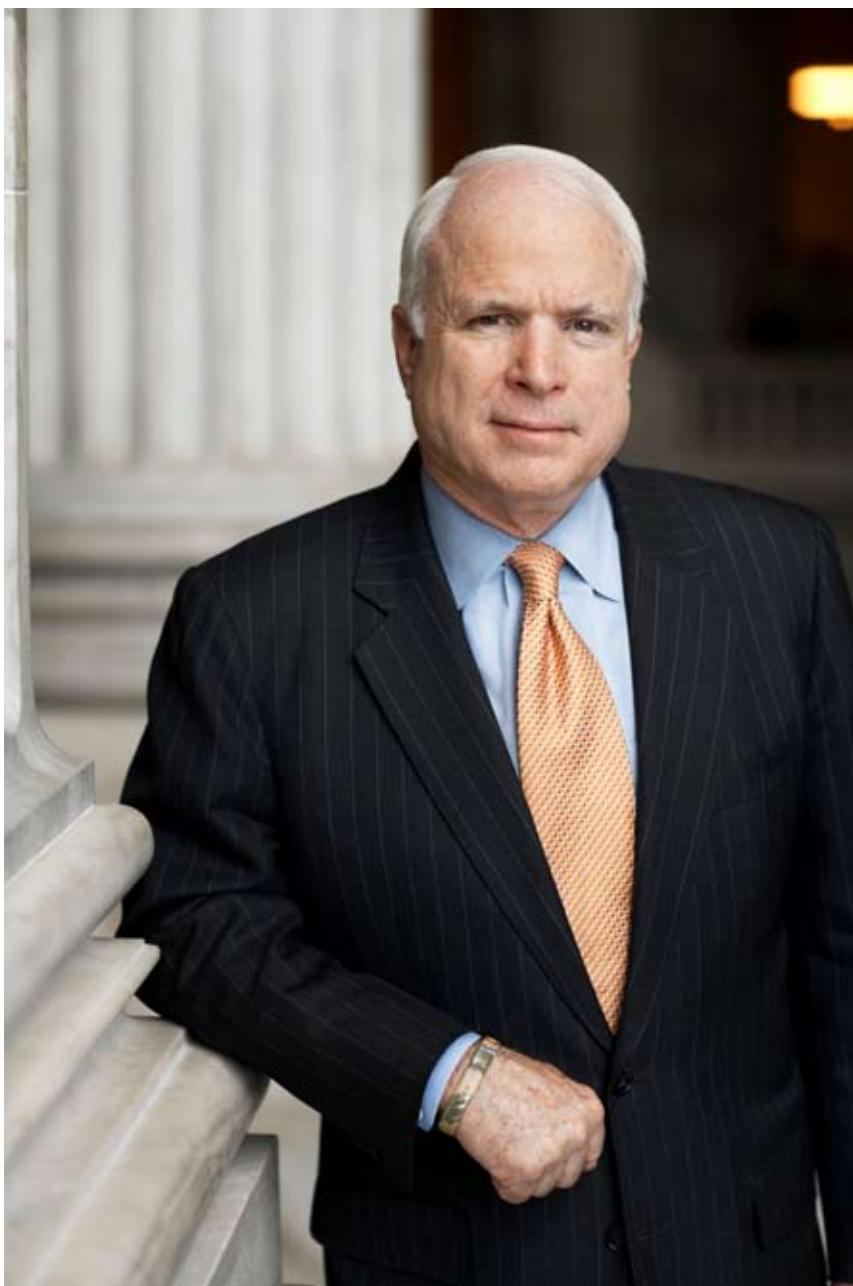
That is not the right way to treat American workers. Companies have a responsibility to take all possible steps to avoid uprooting the lives of thousands of workers before destroying communities that provided the manpower and infrastructure to help those companies grow. The very first step must be to meet with workers and hear their concerns. Whether we're talking about implementing a new business strategy, creating a new government program, or winning a war, a leader doesn't make major decisions before getting an in-depth sense of the facts on the ground. At the very least, Dr. Appel owes it to the people of southwestern Ohio to schedule a town-hall meeting with workers before turning their lives upside down.

Although my primary concerns are about the effect of DHL's plan on working families in Ohio, the deal also threatens consumers more broadly. Simply put, there are substantial antitrust questions raised when the third-largest package delivery company in this country outsources significant elements of its business to the second-largest. After the transaction, FedEx and UPS would be the only remaining U.S. overnight air parcel carriers. This raises serious concerns that consumers all over America would face higher prices and lower quality. Although I do not pre-judge this case, it clearly demands federal review.

I was glad to see that the House Judiciary Committee held a hearing on this matter last week—what I hope will be the beginning of a thorough and probing evaluation of the antitrust implications of DHL's proposed plan. The Justice Department must launch an investigation of this matter as rapidly as possible. The American people must be assured that package-delivery services are priced fairly and that sufficient competition exists in that industry.

But of course my main concern about DHL's plan is its impact on Ohio workers. In the event that this deal does go through, all tiers of government—federal, state, and local—must work in concert to ensure that jobs stay in the region and that working families quickly get back on their feet. We

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must produce and implement a viable commercial development plan for the Wilmington area. The federal government should release national-emergency funding to ensure that we have the resources necessary to meet the challenges ahead.

We must also have an effective displaced worker assistance and training program in place. A cornerstone of my Jobs for America economic plan is to dramatically revamp America's unemployment-insurance program, concentrating on effective job retraining programs. Immediate action on this front will be necessary in Wilmington and the surrounding areas should DHL choose to close down its operations. I know that with a little assistance hardworking Ohioans who lose jobs can quickly rebound.

But I pray we will not reach that point. As President, I will be a forceful advocate for Ohio workers. I will do my best to persuade DHL that closing its Ohio operations is not the answer to its

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financial problems. I cannot guarantee success, but I can guarantee that the working families of southwestern Ohio will have a voice in the White House.

When I was in Wilmington, I spoke with small-business owner Mary Houghtaling, who co-founded a hospice there. Mary's husband is a pilot for ABX. The closure threatens to upend everything they have worked for. The Houghtalings are staring down foreclosure, bankruptcy, and the loss of Mary's business. She told me something I won't soon forget. She said that DHL's announcement had literally sucked the joy out of her community. That is an image that will stick with me. It perfectly captures what this ill-founded plan will do to southwestern Ohio.

I told Mary that I was on her side—on the side of families in southwestern Ohio who have worked so hard for so long. That's not a guarantee that these jobs will stay, because no honest leader could make that promise. But it is a commitment to do everything I can to help these families. To use Mary's words: “We have an ally, finally working for us, not against us.” ✈

