

I rise tonight to honor Ron Gettelfinger for his years of service leading the United Auto Workers. Mr. Gettelfinger spent his entire career in the car business; his first job was at Ford's truck plant in Louisville, Ky. He has been part of the United Auto Workers since 1964 while he was working as a chassis line repairman. After working all day on the line, he went to school at night for a degree in business. While working on his degree, he made the decision that he would apply his education to helping his fellow workers with their daily problems while remaining close to the assembly line. Holding true to this philosophy, he advanced through the UAW organization, becoming president in 2002.

His time as president came during some of the most difficult economic times in our Nation's history. As president, he has served as an effective partner to the major domestic automobile manufacturers during their restructuring. He steered the UAW through this catastrophic period and played an important role in saving the American car industry and the jobs of the workers in the UAW.

During his presidency, Mr. Gettelfinger has fought for basic American values. He has labored to ensure that workers receive a fair share when they help a company prosper. He has championed the rights of workers to receive good health care if they get sick. He has worked to make sure that each worker receives a secure pension for their lifetime of loyal service.

Thanks to the work of leaders like Ron and his predecessors, working people have come a long way--an eight-hour work day, pensions, safer job conditions, and health benefits.

Most notably, Ron Gettelfinger has been known for his outspoken advocacy to make health care accessible and affordable for every woman, man, and child in the United States. I agree with him on this goal and long have supported universal health coverage. I am pleased that this year Congress has passed into law health reform legislation that provides secure coverage to almost all Americans and gives workers more control over their health care. I again congratulate Mr. Gettelfinger on his retirement and thank him again for his service.