

**John DiPietro**  
**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry**  
**October 22, 2008**  
**Steubenville, Ohio**

Good morning, my name is John DiPietro. I am fifty-nine years old and I have worked for Severstal Wheeling, formerly known as Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel, for 37.5 years. I am married and my wife and I have raised three children.

What has happened at my company over this decade has affected my family, my job, my pension and my retirement savings, and my community. The elimination of steel jobs has depressed the local economy and caused a steady drop in employment which in turn has affected our population and our tax base. My children have moved from the Ohio Valley due to better employment opportunities elsewhere.

With the most recent shutdown of the Steubenville Cold Strip Department, my job as a wastewater treatment plant operator servicing the pickling line has been eliminated. I no longer have a specific work area.

The company is calling it a temporary shutdown but no one believes the pickler will be restarted. After 37.5 years, I am a weekly assignee. This leads to frustration, anxiety, and loss of personal wages. The shut down of the Cold Strip Department is a result of a lack of orders reflective of the poor national economy and the fact that the mill is outdated.

We are told that Severstal Wheeling needs to inject \$11 million dollars in repairs to make the pickling line viable. Severstal is a global company that owns other facilities that can fill their

orders. This leaves me and my co-workers in limbo wondering if money will be invested at the Steubenville North Plant so that we can return to our jobs and a stable production schedule.

Prior to the cold strip shutdown, I worked as a blast furnace recycle operator servicing the #1 Blast furnace in Steubenville. The blast furnace operation was permanently closed in 2004. Many jobs were eliminated hurting not only our workers but our local economy as well. Those of us affected had to acquire new skills in new work areas.

Another aspect that has affected me is in the lack of stability within the mill. Despite the increase in production at our mill, our employment is down. Currently, different areas of the mill are working one week, shut down the next week, and then return to operations the following week. Some areas of the mill are training workers for new assignments while other area managers have chosen not to train dedicated employees who may have transferred into their areas. The instability in the production units and the uncertainty in the job assignments have lead to turmoil and anxiety, and this is where I find myself today.

My pension is another problem area. I am 2.5 years away from eligibility for retirement. Recent downward trends in the stock market have eroded my 401K plan. Greed and deregulation have touched us all.

Unfortunately for me, this is the second hit to my retirement plan. The first hit was in 2003 when the Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation froze my pension plan which and my pension plan was eventually terminated. Under the former PBGC plan, I was guaranteed \$40 per year for every year of service. With this multiplier at age 62 my monthly pension would have been \$1600 per month for 40 years of service. Because of the termination of my pension plan

the value of my pension plummeted to \$780 per month, less than half of the previous contractual benefit. What I thought was a fact became a myth. How do you plan for something like this?

Because of the decline in the steel industry our educational systems have experienced a negative effect. Severstal Wheeling pays property taxes to two area school districts and with the loss of wages and decline in tax base our schools receive less funding. The school districts, administrations, faculty, and students suffer. As we all know, the children are the future of any community. If they aren't afforded a solid education along with job opportunities after graduation, the community will surely erode.

On a personal note, I find myself wondering if our plant will ever return to normal operations. I wonder if our plant has a limited future due to the perils of our economic policies, the global economy and consolidation within the steel industry. We at Severstal Wheeling are fighting for our very survival.