

IAM President to Congress: Save Manufacturing!

International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) President Thomas Buffenbarger told IAM delegates to burn the backsides of Congress, with the message that defending the U.S. industrial base is a matter of national security. Buffenbarger addressed the opening session of the IAM's yearly legislative conference in Washington, D.C. on May 15, which was on the theme, "Have You Had Enough Yet?" He quoted from President John F. Kennedy's speech to the IAM conference in May 1963, a speech which, in turn, had quoted President Franklin D. Roosevelt on fighting for the general welfare. Buffenbarger challenged IAM members to get involved in fighting for U.S. leadership to achieve peace around the world, by fostering economic development and optimism.

"We have lost the ability to manufacture the means of our prosperity," and now Congress has given away "the ability of this country to defend itself," he charged. There are only six shipyards left in the country, we can no longer

produce tanks, and we have lost critical machining capacity and the worker expertise needed to develop other weaponry. "We don't even have the ability to train our kids to defend themselves"—not to carry a gun, but training them in the skilled trades necessary to defend the nation.

He denounced the Pentagon's Quadrennial Defense Review, calling on the IAM delegates to grill their Congressmen on it, since they voted for it. I am sure Congress is "clueless" that that QDR outlines the most radical transformation of the military ever proposed, through privatization and outsourcing, he said.

"Politicians will say 'this is our year,' but what good is it to elect Democrats who will do the same things as Republicans do? We need to make a change," he insisted. He rejected President Bush's idea of using troops to patrol the border with Mexico, saying that the immigration problem was created by bad U.S. trade policies like NAFTA. "The immigrants are just trying to feed their families. Don't blame them for a situation we caused."

He ended by demanding that when his members go to Capitol Hill (they were lobbying the next two afternoons), they "kick their asses"—referring to the Congress—and show them how the vision of FDR and JFK can be fulfilled.