

American Bridge 21st Century: Trump Economic Comeback ad features plant laying off 1,000+ workers

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*“Prior to the pandemic, Donald Trump’s economy featured the largest wealth gap in American history. In the past six months, the rich have only gotten richer while millions of Americans are struggling to put food on the table or are facing eviction. Trump uses working people like props and it speaks volumes that he’s willing to use their likeness in ads while whitewashing the economic carnage he unleashed on our country. We need policies that reward work, not wealth, and Joe Biden is the man to offer middle-class families the leg up that they need right now,” **said Kyle Morse, an American Bridge 21st Century spokesperson.***

ICYMI: [VICE: Trump Features Steel Plant That Laid Off Hundreds in New Ad About ‘the Best’ Economy](#)

U.S. Steel notified employees that they would lay off as many as 737 workers at the Granite City plant in late April.

By Cameron Joseph on 9/24/20

President Trump’s campaign is running a television ad claiming that he built “the best” economy in history, and will do so again. But it uses film of a visit he made to a steel plant that recently furloughed hundreds of workers.

The spot shows Trump in a white hardhat with U.S. Steel’s logo on its side, part of a

montage aimed at showing a surge in manufacturing in the country. The clip is from a 2018 visit to the company's Granite City, Illinois plant, where Trump wore the helmet customized with his name across the front and "45" on the back that was gifted to him at the event.

But while Trump visited that plant to take a victory lap for instituting steel tariffs he said would benefit steelworkers, the industry and company have continued to suffer as part of a wider downturn in the industry that began before the coronavirus pandemic but has been worsened by the global crisis.

U.S. Steel notified employees that they would lay off as many as [737 workers](#) at the Granite City plant in late April following news that major auto companies would stop production at many plants as COVID cases spiked across the country.

That came as part of a wider series of cuts. A company spokeswoman said at the time that [2,700 total layoffs](#) would occur immediately, and the company warned 6,500 total workers that they could face furloughs or layoffs—one third of the company's total staff.

"We suffered a lot. We were essential [workers], and had to get rid of some guys," Dan Simmons, the president of United Steelworkers Local 1899, told VICE News. "It's cost us quite a bit. It's been a tough year."

These struggles predate COVID—though the pandemic has made things much worse. U.S. Steel had already moved to lay off [thousands](#) of [workers](#) in three separate rounds of cuts starting last November. By 2019, the price of steel fell by half from its 2018 peak, and industry [analysts say](#) Trump's tariffs traded a short-term boost for a long-term pain in the industry. The economic fallout of the coronavirus has led to even deeper cuts—including at that plant Trump visited.

A U.S. Steel spokeswoman confirmed that the footage in the ad was from Trump's visit to Granite City, and that it was the only time in his presidency that Trump has visited one of their factories. But she declined to further discuss the ad or say exactly how many people had been laid off in those or earlier company cuts.

Trump's ad argues that the coronavirus-fueled downturn, which has sent unemployment rates skyrocketing, is a blip that America will quickly bounce back from—as long as he's reelected.

"I feel very confident in President Trump's ability to get our economy back to where it was, and even better," a woman identified as a small business owner named Juliette says in the ad, which is airing in Florida and debuted last week. "Before the pandemic, our economy was the best it had ever been, the best in the world. If Donald Trump stays president, my outlook for the future is incredibly optimistic. It's limitless."

But workers at the plant Trump used for his photo op aren't feeling so confident.

Simmons, a second-generation steelworker who has worked for four decades at the plant, told VICE News that while Trump's trade move initially helped the company and its workers, the coronavirus' economic impact had ravaged his community.

Simmons said the originally planned 737 furloughs included more than 150 of his unionized workers, and that around 40 of them remained out of work even as the factory continued to operate through the pandemic.

"We've just been struggling this year, it's been a constant struggle. it's been 'cut cut cut,' and the price of steel hasn't been favorable. The relief we got from the 232 [Trump's steel tariffs] isn't there now," he said. "It's been a fucked-up year."

The steel industry saw a brief uptick after Trump put tariffs in place in mid-2018—but it was short-lived. By the United Steelworkers union's count, 40 steelmaking operations have closed in the last few years, leaving 8,000 Americans out of the job. Dozens of other plants have suspended operations and furloughed or laid off workers as demand for products slowed during COVID—especially in the wake of the auto industry's decision to halt production of vehicles as the pandemic worsened in the U.S. last spring.

Trump's campaign argued that the president was the best choice for workers, while sidestepping questions on why they'd used footage of him at a plant that had laid off hundreds of workers to push that point.

"The president has an unmatched record of standing up for American jobs through better trade deals and holding China accountable for their cheating in international dealings. In contrast, Joe Biden voted for the job-killing NAFTA trade deal while his pro-China policies cost the U.S. 60,000 factories and 3.5 million jobs," Trump Communications Director Tim Murtaugh told VICE News in an email. "When it comes to sticking up for workers, President Trump wins the argument and it's not even

close.”

Trump’s slow response to the coronavirus and ongoing refusal to take it nearly as seriously as other world leaders has led to America leading the world in COVID deaths per capita, surpassing 200,000 dead in official counts this week. The haphazard response has also inflicted more economic pain, because rather than getting COVID case numbers under control early on so the U.S. could begin reopening across the board, states that followed Trump’s lead let the count surge over the summer.

“Donald Trump likes to use workers as props, but he’s far less interested in spending time caring for their lived reality,” said United Steel Workers Spokeswoman Jess Kamm Broomell. “It’s not surprising that someone who deals only in photo ops would ignore the real workers, families and communities that continue to suffer on his watch.”

Simmons was more forgiving, saying “it ain’t fair” to blame the COVID crisis solely on Trump.

“I don’t want to point it all at him. We could debate whether he could have done more or less and shortened this, but nobody knows,” he said.

Polls show that while Trump continues to trail Joe Biden by wide margins on most issues, the economy is a relative bright spot for the president even during the widespread economic crisis caused by the pandemic and worsened by Trump’s mishandling of it.

A national Quinnipiac University poll released Wednesday found that voters said by a narrow 49%-48% that Trump would do a better job handling the economy than Biden, while they said by 55%-39% that Biden would do a better job handling the coronavirus response. Biden led in the poll among likely voters by 52%-42%.

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