

Mayor: 'This Is Deplorable:' U.S. Steel To Idle Granite City Works Blast Furnace Operations

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GRANITE CITY — U.S. Steel has put the blame on the United Autoworker's strike for a decrease in demand but has said they are idling operations of a blast furnace at Granite City Works until conditions improve. Meanwhile, the Granite City mayor, a U.S. congressman, and a major labor representative describe the move as "shameful."

The United Steelworkers plans to meet with U.S. Steel to hopefully minimize layoffs with their contract.

The auto workers' strike against Detroit's Big Three now enters day four with no signs Monday of any breakthrough.

Granite City Mayor Mike Parkinson issued a statement about the idling and said: "There is reason for shutting down the furnace. This is a way they can idle employees without notice. It is deplorable and I question the fact they are doing it because of the auto industry strike. This is not a way to treat American workers."

U.S. Steel made this statement following the announcement of UAW strike actions:

"We are executing our risk mitigation plan to ensure our melt capacity is balanced with our order book. As a result, we have decided to temporarily idle the blast furnace 'B' at Granite City Works and are reallocating volumes as needed to other domestic facilities to efficiently meet customer demand.

"We thank our employees for working to ensure the temporary idling of the furnace will be conducted safely and efficiently. We do not take these decisions lightly and will continue to monitor and assess market conditions."

Today, U.S. Representative Nikki Budzinski (IL-13) issued the following statement on U.S. Steel idling the B furnace at Granite City Works, resulting in temporary layoffs for hundreds of employees.

"U.S. Steel's decision to idle operations in Granite City and lay off workers is an outrage. And their effort to blame this announcement on the United Auto Workers strike is a shameful attempt to pit working people against one another. We must hold them accountable.

"No company should be allowed to hand a pink slip to workers without notice and without recourse. In Congress, I'm actively working to strengthen the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) Act and improve assistance available to impacted workers through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). My team and I stand ready to assist the steelworkers affected by this announcement.

"I have been in touch with U.S. Steel, the United Steelworkers, and the Mayor of Granite City as we continue to learn more about the extent of layoffs and the resources available to those put out of work. I believe in the working men and women of Granite City and the importance of their careers to the future of our local and national economy. I will never stop fighting to protect their jobs and their livelihoods."

U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) today released the following statement regarding U.S. Steel's announcement to temporarily idle blast furnace 'B' at the Granite City Works plant:

“Steel production is a key component of our nation's economic health. It is also a major source of employment throughout the country and in the State of Illinois, where the steel industry supports thousands of jobs. Idling blast furnace 'B' at Granite City Works — even temporarily — will have a significant impact on its workers and the local economy.

“I urge U.S. Steel to work closely with the community and employees to ease these impacts and reopen blast furnace 'B' as soon as possible.”

U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) released the following statement in response to U.S. Steel's announcement to temporarily idle blast furnace 'B' at the Granite City Works Plant:

“I am deeply disappointed by U.S. Steel's awful decision to 'temporarily' idle blast furnace B at Granite City Works, and I am troubled by what seems like the company's disingenuous reasoning for doing so. My thoughts go out to the working families impacted by this heartless choice.

“American steel is literally the backbone of the American economy, and—working alongside Senator Durbin, Rep. Budzinski and Mayor Parkinson—I will do everything in my power to ensure U.S. Steel sticks to its word that this is a temporary idling, help these hardworking Illinoisans keep their jobs and reopen blast furnace B as quickly as possible so this community can get back to work.”

Parkinson said it is clear leaders at U.S. Steel are using any tactics they can and it will hurt workers.

“I have been on the phone with Congressman Budzinski and Dan Simmons of the labor union,” he said. “It is clear it is just another tactic by U.S. Steel to find loopholes in laws to idle the plant. I see this as a terrible tactic.”