Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

May 19, 2006

The Honorable Elaine L. Chao
Secretary
United States Department of Labor
200 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Secretary Chao:

We write to request the Department of Labor's assistance with helping dislocated Maytag workers attain funding for services needed to attain new and gainful employment. As we are sure you are aware, Whirlpool announced on May 10th that it would be closing the Newton, Iowa plant and headquarters of recently acquired Maytag. Maytag employed far more people in Newton than any of the town's other businesses. The loss of 1,800 jobs will be profoundly felt in that community, and if appropriate federal resources are not immediately made available these layoffs will have a devastating effect on the lives and economic security of these workers and their families. Our goal is to ensure that the 1,800 persons who are losing their jobs will have immediate access to the full range of DOL programs and services.

Most importantly, our constituents will need the benefits available under the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Act and the Alternative Trade Adjustment Assistance (ATAA) Act. Competition from foreign imports has been a principal reason for the loss of these jobs. In fact, there is a current TAA petition certified through DOL that expires on December 23, 2006, issued prior to the announcement of the latest round of layoffs. We formally request that you extend the current petition in order to ensure that all affected employees are treated equally in the face of this devastating closure of Maytag's plant.

Because Whirlpool's current plans call for salaried and management employees to be laid off before the end of the year, those employees would be eligible for benefits under the current TAA petition. The line workers, however, will not be laid off until May of 2007, and therefore would not be eligible for TAA benefits unless DOL extends the current petition. It would be a grave disservice to the line workers, who are most in need of these benefits, if the current TAA petition were not extended. Global competition is the reason that Maytag was on the selling block, and is the reason that Whirlpool has decided to consolidate operations.

In addition, we request that the Department mobilize the DOL Rapid Response program to work with state and local workforce development agencies to help Maytag employees find new jobs. These workers require career counseling and job search

assistance, information about unemployment insurance; opportunities for education and training, as well as information about their health benefits and pension options. Rapid Response specialists have a unique ability to provide this training, and we request that these specialists be mobilized immediately to help dislocated Maytag workers.

Further, we understand the state of Iowa will apply for a National Emergency Grant to expand its capacity to respond effectively to the dire situation the Newton economy now faces. The layoffs in Newton clearly exceed the minimum criteria for National Emergency Grant assistance, and we fully support and urge the Department's approval of any such application.

We also request that, upon application by the Des Moines Area Community College, the Department provide assistance through the award of a Community-Based Job Training Grant. This program increases the capacity of community colleges to provide training for new and transitioning workers in a local high growth, high demand industry. This is precisely the kind of assistance Maytag employees in Newton require at this time. In a 2004 address to an Ohio community college gathering, President Bush said the following:

> (W)e're not going to quit on anybody. And we're going to make sure the community college system does its job. As you know full well, particularly if you're a trustee of the community college, that most of the money is local money, but the federal government can help, particularly when it comes to job training.

The President was correct. The federal government and the Department of Labor, in particular, can and should fulfill a critical role in providing job training to citizens, especially to laid-off workers. The Des Moines Area Community College recently became the entity responsible for administering Employment and Training Administration programs for the region in which Newton is located, so it is well-positioned to manage and execute a Community-Based Job Training Grant.

Newton line workers may have skills that are not easily transferable, and global competition is making it increasingly less and less likely that they will find comparable work in their industry. The assistance available through DOL programs and funds can and should be a bridge to new employment opportunities for these workers. We appreciate your timely consideration of these requests and look forward to working with you as you provide our constituents the assistance they so urgently need.

Sincerely,

Tom Harkin
United States Senator

Leonard Boswell
United States Representative