

Bush Omaha visit: company rescinds payless workday

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Just hours before President George W. Bush was due to speak in support of his tax cut plan at a plastics factory in Omaha, Nebraska, the company reversed its decision to dock workers' pay while the plant was idled for the presidential event.

Airlite Plastic Company President and CEO Brad Crosby had originally given the 575 employees one of four options during the Bush visit: take the day off without pay; work at a part of the plant that will remain open during the speech; take the day off and make up the time on the following Saturday; or use a vacation day.

Bad publicity arose from the obvious irony of Bush's trying to explain to workers how "to put money in their pockets" while forcing them to lose a day's pay for the privilege. According to a May 9 report in the *Omaha-World Herald*, an Airlite employee complained to an editor in a voice mail message that some longtime employees would lose more than \$130 in pay.

"It's not a great thing for us employees," said the worker, "We're losing a lot of money because of his visit. His speech is supposed to be about what the family can get back from his tax breaks. It doesn't really make sense."

Three hours before Bush arrived, White House spokeswoman Claire Buchan announced that Airlite had backed down and said it would pay all its employees whether they worked, attended Bush's speech or took the day off. "We're pleased. We think it's the right thing to do," said Buchan. Apparently, the company's pay policy reversal was encouraged in high places.

This is probably due to the fact that for the second time this month a Bush photo-op generated negative commentary. Even in the bourgeois media the president's May 1 "victory" speech on an aircraft

carrier was criticized as an irresponsible stunt.

Bush spoke on Monday at Airlite against a backdrop of piled-high plastic containers and a sign that read, "Working for American Families." The new, nonunion plant makes plastic containers for pharmaceutical and food transportation, as well as plastic food packaging.

The president's visit to Nebraska is one stop in an intense campaign to sell his \$550 billion tax cut for the rich plan. In a prerecorded radio message the day before the Airlite stop, Bush said: "The surest way to grow this economy and create jobs is to leave more money in the hands of the people who earn it."

Reporting on the president's speech at the plastics factory, the *Omaha World-Herald* stated that Bush complained he had inherited an economy in recession when he took office in 2001 and further, that the terrorist attack of September 11 interrupted the turnaround that was beginning to take place under his presidency. Then, Bush claimed, came the stock market scandal caused by dishonest corporate executives who got "big shot-it-itis."

In his usual unctuous manner, Bush singled out local resident Jenny Theisen and asserted that her family's \$1,300 in tax savings from the increased child credit would help stimulate the economy. Theisen then told Bush that any monies that she saved through his plan would be used to remodel her house. "Somebody's got to show up at her house to do the remodeling," responded Bush. "Somebody's got to bring the hammer, the saw and the paint. There are going to be thousands of people like her." This "grass-roots" example was meant to demonstrate the chain-reactive, job-creating dynamic of his proposal.

Bush also defended his controversial corporate dividend tax cut, which he said would create 400,000 jobs by 2004. The *World-Herald* report did not indicate

that any evidence was presented to back up this claim. Since Bush persuaded Congress to pass the biggest tax cuts in a generation two years ago, 1.5 million jobs have disappeared.

However, Bush did not deny that his proposed measure would add to the ballooning budget deficit. “Yeah, I’m concerned about the deficit,” jawed the president, adding the non-sequitur, “But I’m more concerned about the people looking for a job today.”

Recalling his previous visit to Nebraska on September 11, 2001 when Bush arrived at Offutt Air Force Base shortly after the attacks in New York and Washington, he said: “I was here on that fateful day when they hit us. They thought we were weak. They thought we would fold our tent. What they’ve seen ... is a relentless campaign against global terror.”

A group of protesters were kept far away from the Airlite plant and the presidential motorcade route. “That’s not freedom of speech. That’s not freedom of assembly. That puts them out back and no one will see them,” protester Fran Higgins, a 41-year mother, told the *Associated Press*.

American Civil Liberties Union director Tim Butz complained: “What makes these people [the demonstrators] more dangerous than the people standing down there [at Airlite]? The signs.”

Signs protesting Bush’s visit read: “No millionaire left behind,” “18 cents a day: the average Nebraska tax cut,” and “Health care and Social Security, not tax cuts for the wealthy.”



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