

Del. lawmakers 'disappointed' with decision (The News Journal)

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Biden, Carper, Castle vow to help families affected by the 'major blow'

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WASHINGTON --

Delaware's congressional delegation vowed Thursday to explore "every possible resource" to help families affected by Chrysler's decision to close its Newark auto assembly plant a year earlier than planned.

Delegation

members called the announcement "a major blow, especially when the company had assured its workers that the plant would stay open until the end of 2009."

"As

Delaware's congressional delegation, our main concern is for the thousands of men and women whose lives will be devastated by this decision," Sen. Joe Biden, Sen. Tom Carper and Rep. Mike Castle said in a joint statement.

The

statement said the Newark plant employees, their families and the Newark community need "the full support of federal, state and local officials." It did not mention specific actions the delegation would take, and the lawmakers' representatives said they were unavailable for further comment.

In

light of the Newark plant's strong work force and the "\$25 billion that Congress recently approved for auto companies to stem the tide of job losses and plant closures, we are particularly disappointed that Chrysler decided to close its Newark plant a year early," the statement said.

approved \$7.5 billion this month to guarantee \$25 billion in loans to the auto industry, but it could be a while before automakers see any money, said Chrysler spokeswoman Linda Becker.

Automakers

in need of fast cash are still waiting to learn from the government what the rules are for applying, she said. Chrysler, she said, likely would apply for a loan to fund technology for fuel-efficient vehicles.

"It's crunch time," she said. "This has to be looked at differently, given the circumstances. The infusion needs to come as soon as possible."

The

Delaware delegation had been urging the company to retool its Newark plant and build smaller vehicles since the plant's closure became a possibility, said Sam Lathem, president of the state AFL-CIO, an umbrella organization for the United Auto Workers and other labor groups.

"We didn't really have much hope for a hybrid Durango," he said. "It's still an SUV. It's still big."

Even so, Lathem said he was surprised when he learned of the announcement Thursday morning.

"Nobody had a warning what was going to happen," he said.

Moving

forward, he said the group will focus on retraining the work force for other opportunities. The Newark plant has been operating on one shift since 2006. The company announced it would work with the United Auto Workers to address the layoffs "in a socially responsible manner."

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