

UAW may have deal with Moroun

Union's leader could fight bridge proposal

By Dave Battagello, The Windsor Star

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Disappointment and anger were being expressed Friday across the business and labour spectrum over talk of United Auto Workers leader Bob King cutting a deal with Ambassador Bridge owner Matty Moroun to fight together on a Nov. 6 election proposal in Michigan that threatens to derail the \$1-billion government-backed Windsor-Detroit bridge.

Media reports in Detroit and Lansing say King has offered the UAW's support for a Moroun-backed ballot initiative known as Proposal 6 that would require voter approval in Michigan before any new bridge could be constructed.

The billionaire Grosse Pointe businessman would, in return, donate cash to the UAW's fight on another ballot initiative, Proposal 2, that would secure collective bargaining into the state's constitution.

The UAW, should it back Moroun, would be breaking ranks with dozens of other labour and business organizations on both sides of the border - including the Big Three automakers - who are firmly in support of the downriver Detroit River International Crossing (DRIC) bridge.

Moroun has been fighting for years to stop the project which threatens to redirect up to 75 per cent of \$60 million in annual toll revenues at his bridge.

CAW president Ken Lewenza told The Star he spoke with King by phone on Friday and made it clear his union's support has always been - and will continue to be - directly behind getting the DRIC bridge built.

"I told (King) the CAW will always support and is very involved in the decision-making (under the Canadian Automotive Partnership Council) to get the bridge built," Lewenza said.

"I told him the CAW is inflexible on this and did not want to be caught in the middle."

King, in return, first described of being upset over being portrayed the only labour leader in Michigan singled out in the bridge debate when several others feel the same way as himself, Lewenza said.

He indicated to Lewenza union leaders across the state are frustrated over being asked by Gov. Rick Snyder to fight against the bridge ballot proposal or support the DRIC bridge while, at the same time, the governor has become a hindrance or remains silent on other labour concerns, including Proposal 2.

"I can understand how the entire labour movement in Michigan wants a more balanced approach from the (governor) and there has been a great deal of resistance," Le-wenza said.

"We have our share of problems with the Harper government - and even the McGuinty government - but this bridge is good for the economy and jobs.

"We also need another bridge to make sure there is security in the movement of trade with a secondary crossing. To me, that's most important on all this."

Dino Chiodo, president of the Windsor and District Labour Council, was angry over the prospect of King breaking away from widespread labour support of the DRIC bridge.

"This is a great project offering plenty of jobs," he said. "I don't understand why anyone would not support going in that direction. We need another crossing to move products and trade between the two countries.

"Instead of being caught up win politics, I really feel we need to focus on what's best for Canadian and American people as a whole.

"This is win-win for both sides.

"I'm surprised to see anyone put up roadblocks that would circumvent employment for people in need.

"(King) is involved with workers in auto manufacturing and he needs to take another look at that and see how this is affecting his workers as a whole.

"Some long-terms jobs will come out of this if (the bridge) is built."

Ambassador Bridge officials on Friday would not confirm a deal with the UAW was in the works.

The Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber issued a joint letter with the Canadian and Ontario chambers of support for the DRIC project and expressing dismay over the UAW hinting at a Moroun deal.

"This issue is complex enough without people changing uniforms at halftime," said Matt Marchand, CEO for the local chamber.

Local MP Brian Masse wondered whether the move by the UAW would backfire given the level of disdain many residents in Michigan have toward Moroun.

He pointed to a recent survey, released earlier this week, that showed only one person out of 600 held a highly favourable view of the bridge owner.

"Apparently that one is Mr. King," Masse said.

"I don't know the motivation, but by doing this they are aligning themselves with somebody shown to be significantly unpopular.

"This could backfire because they are going against the position of many labour groups, including the Teamsters who have indicated they want this border crossing, and [are] supportive in any way to move it forward."