

Thomas Otto Testimony

Good Morning, and I hope everyone is doing well. Let me first start off by giving you a little background on myself. My name is Thomas Otto, I am 33 years old, and I live in Wenonah, NJ which is right near Woodbury, NJ. I am married with two handsome boys.

I started my career as a Union Boilermaker, where I served in a 4-year apprenticeship from 2007-2011. While in the apprenticeship, I could see that I would not be able to provide a good life for my future family, as work wasn't always available, and I spent most of the year on Unemployment. So, in April 2011, I made the move from my apprenticeship and started doing what they would call Tank work, which was maintaining and repairing above ground oil storage tanks that you would see in Oil Refineries, Chemical Refineries, and Logistic Terminals to name a few. While doing that, I was putting applications out to companies, including DuPont numerous times. In September of 2012 I was given the chance to take a written test, then I got to interview and do a hands-on test in November 2012, and in December 2012 I got the call/e-mail that they would like to offer me the job as a mechanical technician with a start date of February 2013.

Once I started at DuPont, everyone told me I would have a job for life. My wife and I decided to have our first child in October 2013, and I was starting to learn the new role at DuPont, I also got involved in my local union at the site, United Steelworkers Local 943 as a shop steward. I served as a shop steward from 2013-2016, I then made the move to becoming a union rep and being on the union board. During those times, I helped improve union/management relations, made the union stronger by coming together, and also made the site more profitable and safer.

Then on February 28, 2018, I got the call from HR that we needed to meet at 7:00am tomorrow. I had a bad feeling in my stomach because we already had a meeting scheduled for 13:00 that day. The HR could not tell me why. So, I met the next day and found out I was losing my job, and it was being shipped overseas where DuPont would no longer be making the product but instead purchasing from someone who could make it.

From that point on, I had no idea what I was going to do, but I needed to stay strong for my membership, and I reached out to local companies and set up on-site interviews. I then found out about the TAA program from my international rep. My international rep and HR worked very hard on getting it approved. But it was not approved by the time our last day came. I received 2 offers for a job during my last few months at DuPont. I accepted one that was 86 miles one way from my house, and I thought it was my dream job back in the oil refinery, like I always wanted.

Well after two days, it just didn't feel right. Then I got a call saying the Grant was approved and what I needed to do. That night I did what I needed to do, and the next day on my way home Mary called me. Mary was my TAA rep from the state of New Jersey. We scheduled a meeting and she explained the whole process to me. After our meeting I decided I wanted to get back to welding and we wrote out the plan. She was very helpful and even helped the school I chose with anything they needed.

After completing school, I got a job at a Dow Chemical Site as a contractor being told I would get hired as in-house. Well, that never happened, and I chose to seek other employment. Now, let's fast forward a couple months. I went back to the Boilermakers Union and was working but then in April 2020, I got laid off because of Covid. I told myself I would take the unemployment and the additional pay and instead of

jumping into the next job, I would find a good place to work where I could provide again like I did. After months of interviewing and job offers, I went and applied for my current job.

Once I passed the first interview, I was given a test, then an interview. At the interview, I handed the panel my welding certificates, which I received from the Grant. Those certificates are the upper hand I needed to land this job.

My current role is a mechanical technician in a Natural Gas Power Plant where I do many roles including Welding, Mechanical Work (All Trades), and running the contractors. I also got a 11% raise from what I was making at DuPont to my Current role.

I believe without the program, I would have lost everything I worked so hard for, including providing for my family. As my welding teacher always said, "Give a person a fish you feed them for the day, teach them to weld you feed them for a lifetime."

I would like to thank you for your time and if anyone has any questions, I would be more than happy to answer them.