

CAR RECOVERY CZAR ED MONTGOMERY COMES TO MICHIGAN

In a little noticed detail from Monday's verdict on the auto industry, Obama named Ed Montgomery Director of Recovery for Auto Communities.

Today, the President appointed Ed Montgomery, former Deputy Secretary of the Labor Department and current Dean at the University of Maryland, to become Director of Recovery for Auto Communities and Workers. Dr. Montgomery has more than 25 years experience working on issues related to worker training and local economic development and has worked first hand with State and local government agencies and nonprofits in Michigan and Ohio on strategies to revitalizing areas hit by job loss.

In his new role, Dr. Montgomery will bring all parties – workers, firms, unions, other private sector employers, community-based organizations, state and local governments, and foundations – to the table to maximize communication and cooperation and to develop innovative strategies for relief and recovery. He will ensure that communities and workers can take full advantage of all available resources and to ensure that the funds are distributed quickly, efficiently and equitably. He will work with the Administration, relevant Governors and Congressional leaders to launch new executive and legislative initiatives to support these distressed communities and help them retool and revitalize their economies. He will identify and pursue all possible opportunities, including for example, initiatives to:

- *Maximize the effectiveness of Recovery Act funds for new and more diverse economic development for new jobs, business and industry through various means including local infrastructure, housing, education and new industry.*
- *Deploy rapid response unit to communities facing plant closings to both meet immediate needs and to develop strategies for new job growth.*
- *Extend Trade-Adjustment-Assistance (TAA) to the auto industry, including retraining, healthcare extensions, income support and wage insurance.*
- *Attract major defense, research, green industry and other project to the region. Channel Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and other emergency grant funds to the region.*
- *Work with stakeholders to develop new*

legislative efforts to direct emergency support to affected communities and regions, and bring new jobs and economic opportunities to these areas.

Today, Montgomery met with Governor Granholm (and, after this presser, with Detroit Mayor Ken Cockrel) to talk about the needs of Michigan's blighted auto communities.

Montgomery strikes me as a good choice. Unlike Steven Rattner, Montgomery has the background to understand Michigan's issues (and once taught at MSU), and the bureaucratic chops to actually do some good.

As he explained in the video above, his wife's family is an auto family. Granholm also said he drives an American car—another distinguishing feature from most of those Obama chose to decide Detroit's fate—though she didn't say what kind.

Montgomery's introduction, above, provides about as much detail as he was ready to give. He's here (48 hours after being appointed) to listen, at this point.

The bulk of the questions reflected the urgency of the situation in ways that weren't designed to elicit real information: Will you lower the unemployment rate in Michigan? What can you do before Chrysler goes into bankruptcy in thirty days? Do you realize that if GM goes under, Michigan's unemployment may double? What can you do in thirty days? How many cars do they have to sell not to get put into bankruptcy in 30 days? (Many of these questions seemed both unclear on the process going forward for Chrysler and GM, not to mention who is making those decisions; it's not Montgomery, it remains Rattner.)

To these questions, Montgomery repeated that

he's working for those who have already been laid off as well as anyone who might be laid off in the future.

The most interesting question asked Montgomery to compare this situation in Michigan with the experience in Katrina.

I didn't get a chance to ask my question—which I will try to follow up on. But it would have been, "Will you be part of the larger discussions on health care reform?" After all, if we don't pass a real health care reform package—as opposed to the one without a public option currently being championed by Blue Dogs—then we'll be right here in 6 months talking about the imminent bankruptcy of Ford. (And of a bunch of other companies around the country.)

In any case, I liked Montgomery. He seemed way more measured than the panicked Michiganders asking him the questions. But it remains to be seen whether this position will work. After all, aren't our elected representatives supposed to be able to pave the way with the Federal government for us? What does it say—Constitutionally and practically—that Michigan and other auto communities will have a designated champion within the Executive Branch, even as the Executive Branch is dismantling our largest industry?