

WASHINGTON -- When the House approved legislation Wednesday to help the Big Three Detroit automakers, it did so without the support of Midlands lawmakers.

All three Nebraska House members and U.S. Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa, voted against the bill.

Nebraska and Iowa have businesses related to auto manufacturing, repair and sales. Those businesses employ about 22,000 in Nebraska and 45,000 in Iowa.

Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, R-Neb., said he doesn't want to see any family experience unemployment or any business fail. He also said a vibrant domestic auto industry is important.

But the proposal the House approved Wednesday night -- \$14 billion in emergency loans and some new federal oversight -- simply underwrites a structure that has put the industry in dire straits, he said.

"The first order of business, it would seem to me, is that the CEOs, the board of directors and the union chiefs should all go, and they should do so voluntarily," Fortenberry said.

Fortenberry said he wished alternative proposals had been explored, including one to have the federal government put in a large order to Detroit for fleet vehicles to guarantee demand.

Rep. Lee Terry, R-Neb., said the legislation was not the right approach to the problems of the auto companies. He said the public doesn't want to throw money at the automakers to keep them alive for a short time.

The companies have to modernize, he said. "They can't keep doing it the way they've been doing it."

Terry initially opposed, then supported a \$700 billion rescue plan for Wall Street financial firms. He has since complained about the administration's handling of that money.

King, who represents western Iowa, said labor unions have not made the necessary concessions to make the auto companies viable.

"The House voted to pick up the tab for overpriced labor and managerial mistakes without meaningful concessions from either," King said.

Rep. Adrian Smith, R-Neb., said it came down to whether the auto industry is interested in sustainable business practices.

"They couldn't get a loan from their bank. Why should they get a loan from the government?" Smith said.

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