

# Ford Breaks From Trump Over Ban as Detroit Muslims Protest

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Majed Moughni has lived the American dream: He climbed the ladder from impoverished refugee, to hotel dishwasher, to parking cars for Ford Motor Co. royalty. Today he's a lawyer, sitting at a chair and desk in an office that all once belonged to a Ford chief executive officer whose Lincoln Continental he used to park.



*Source: Majed Moughni*

Moughni sees the business case behind Ford's senior executives courting Donald Trump after the president spent months criticizing automakers for making cars in Mexico. Their silence through the weekend on Trump's order halting immigration from seven Middle Eastern countries was another matter, and he couldn't hide his disappointment.

“I’m a product of what Trump is trying to ban,” Moughni said. “It’s careless. This is a country of immigrants.”

Automakers are walking a tightrope as they court Trump, whose policies on clean-air standards, corporate taxes and trade will affect their fortunes. They have to balance that against other considerations closer to home: The traditional three U.S. automakers are based in Michigan, which backed Trump’s surprise victory but also has a substantial Middle Eastern population troubled by his executive order on immigration.

Executive Chairman Bill Ford and CEO Mark Fields issued a joint statement Monday saying that they don’t support Trump’s travel ban policy, “or any other that goes against our values as a company.” General Motors Co. sent a notice to employees Sunday saying it will support any employees traveling back to the U.S. with a visa who encounter difficulties.

## **Ford Values**

“We are not aware, to date, of any Ford employees directly affected by this policy,” Ford and Fields said in an e-mailed statement. “We will continue working to ensure the well-being of our employees by promoting the values of respect and inclusion in the workplace.”

Ford’s hometown of Dearborn has been referred to as America’s Muslim Capital, with more than 30 percent of the population of Arab descent. From 2005 to 2015, the state accepted 19,545 refugees from Iraq and Syria -- two of the seven countries affected by Trump’s ban.

“People would say that if you landed here at 9 p.m., you can have a job at 9 the next morning,” Ibrahim Kazerooni, the imam at Dearborn’s Islamic Center of America, said in an interview. “We have many people in our community who work at Ford. We’re a part of this community.”

## **Immigration Canceled**

Plans for 26 refugees to immigrate to the Detroit area from Iraq and Syria in the next week have been canceled, said Lynne Golodner, spokeswoman for Samaritas, formerly known as Lutheran Social Services of Michigan, which

has a contract with the state to help asylum seekers settle and find employment.

Trump took special aim at Ford during the campaign and the automaker has worked to get back in his good graces. Bill Ford, a great-grandson of the founder Henry, has said he can always get a hold of Trump, or the president calls him. Fields, the CEO, visited the White House on back-to-back days last week to discuss jobs, fuel-economy standards and even Oval Office decor. Much of the auto industry was silent on the immigration order during the weekend. Mark Reuss, GM's executive vice president for product development, declined to discuss Trump's immigration policy during a fuel cell vehicles press conference Monday. Representatives for Fiat Chrysler Automobiles NV, Toyota Motor Corp., Nissan Motor Co., Hyundai Motor Co. and Honda Motor Co. declined to comment.

“They should be proactive and stand up for the Muslim community,” Mohammad All, a 26-year-old Ford engineer, said during a protest Sunday at Detroit Metropolitan Airport, before Ford issued its statement. He entered the U.S. from Iraq in 1997 after years in a Rafha, Saudi Arabia, refugee camp.

The United Auto Workers union, which represents GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers, “denounces any policy that judges people based on their religion or nation of origin,” President Dennis Williams said in a statement Monday.

## **Entwined History**

Moughni's is one of countless stories that show the entwined relationship of the auto industry to the region's immigrant population.

Protesters also gathered Sunday in Hamtramck, a 2-square-mile city within the borders of Detroit whose longstanding ties to the auto industry include a GM factory that makes sedans and the Volt plug-in hybrid. A Polish enclave for most of the last century, Hamtramck now has a vast Muslim population because of immigration from Bangladesh, Yemen, and to a lesser degree, Bosnia. “This is what immigration looks like!” was one frequent chant. Hamtramck has the nation's first Muslim-majority city council, and the panel's top vote-getters in the last two elections descend from Yemen -- another of the nations affected by the decree. Automakers are afraid of Trump,

Councilman Saad Almasmar said in an interview at the Sunday rally: “That’s why they keep silent.”

## **Refugee’s Story**

It was in Hamtramck that Moughni’s father -- newly arrived in America ahead of his family -- landed a job on the assembly line at a Chrysler plant. The father saved up enough to buy plane tickets for his family, including his eight kids, and eventually managed to afford a Chrysler LeBaron. Moughni was 6 when he and his family moved to America in 1977 to escape civil war in Lebanon.

The Chrysler gig lasted only about two years, until Moughni’s father joined the thousands of autoworkers swept from the industry after an oil shock. The father worked as a cashier at a convenience store, while Moughni did his part to make ends meet.

“It wasn’t much of a life growing up with your dad not having the financial means to raise eight kids,” Moughni says. At 12, he started mowing lawns and picking weeds for neighbors. By 15, he worked at a Domino’s Pizza. At 18, he was hired at the newly opened Ritz-Carlton hotel in Dearborn -- first as a dishwasher, and later as a parking valet.

## **‘Meant to Be’**

It was the Ritz job that helped Moughni pay his way through undergraduate school at the University of Michigan at Dearborn. It also introduced him to Bill Ford, Edsel Ford II and Harold “Red” Poling, the CEO who steered Ford through the early-1990s recession. Moughni got to know Poling by name.

When Poling died in 2012 and the office Ford rented for the retired CEO -- right across from the Ritz -- came up for lease, Moughni seized on the opportunity. The late Poling’s former space, complete with the red leather chair and mahogany desk, has been home to Majed A. Moughni Law Offices for about three years.

“It was meant to be,” Moughni says.

Moughni sees common ground with Trump, and in fact made an unsuccessful run for Congress about six years ago as a Republican with a motto to keep jobs and production in America. But for companies like Ford, which he notes has many engineers from India, he couldn't understand the delay in speaking out.

“As far as Ford and Mark Fields and Bill Ford cozying up to Trump, I don't think that's a bad thing” for the company, Moughni said. Even so, “they should be outraged as well that this policy may trickle over to other parts of the world.”