Trump pledges tariffs, repeats false claims of Chinese automakers

Former President Donald Trump on Tuesday repeated false claims that Chinese automakers are putting up large factories in Mexico, vowing during a stop in the automaking state of Michigan to slap 200 per cent tariffs on any vehicles the unbuilt plants make and ship to the United States.

Trump also claimed during an event in Flint that if Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris is elected in November, there will be no more auto industry in the US, because work building electric vehicles will go to China.

That statement came even though automaking employment has grown since President Joe Biden took office in January 2021, after dropping during Trump's first term.

“If I don't win, you will have no auto industry within two to three years," Trump said, calling any increases under Biden and Harris temporary. You will not have any manufacturing plants. China is going to take over all of them because of the electric car.

He told the crowd he would make foreign automakers build factories in the US by imposing tariffs on imported autos, saying it will be like taking candy from a baby.

Foreign automakers already have multiple US factories, mainly in southern states.

Auto jobs dipped 0.8 per cent during Trump's term to just over 949,000 in January 2021, when he left office, according to the Bureau of Labour Statistics.

Since Biden took office that month, auto and parts jobs rose 13.6 per cent to 1.07 million in August, so there's no evidence of the industry disappearing. Auto sales were up 2.4 per cent in the first half of this year. Trump said his tariffs would make Chinese vehicles built in Mexico unsellable in the US, forcing automakers from China and elsewhere to set up factories in the US.

They're owned and built by China in Mexico, and there are a number of them going up right now, Trump said of Chinese factories. Although some Chinese automakers aspire to sell in the US, industry analysts say there are no large Chinese-owned auto factories under construction in Mexico, and there's only one small Chinese auto assembly factory operating there. It's run by a company called JAC that builds inexpensive vehicles from kits for sale in that country.

Trump also promised to charge tariffs on vehicles made in other countries if those countries tax US-made vehicles. But often tariffs end up being passed on to consumers in the country that assesses them.

The Harris campaign issued a statement from Michigan Sen. Gary Peters saying that a second Trump term would crush auto jobs, ceding Michigan's global auto manufacturing leadership to the Chinese government. He said Harris has a plan to bring good-paying manufacturing jobs home "and ensure Michigan workers continue to lead the world in auto manufacturing.