



Statement by Shawn Fain, International President, UAW, before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions for a hearing on *Standing Up Against Corporate Greed: How Unions Are Improving the Lives of Working Families*

November 14, 2023

Good morning, Chairman Sanders, Dr. Cassidy, and members of the Committee.

I am honored to join this hearing as the International President of the UAW, proudly representing close to 400,000 active members and nearly 600,000 retirees, across a wide range of sectors, from auto manufacturing to higher education.

My roots in the auto industry run back to the early days when my Grandpa was hired in at Chrysler in 1937, the year the UAW first organized Chrysler.

That job was life-changing for my Grandpa. His generation took pride in not only being a UAW member, but in working for a Big Three company to build cars for America. It changed the entire trajectory for my family. I shared that same pride when I was hired in, too.

But throughout my 29 years as a UAW member, I've seen drastic changes. I witnessed our working standards and conditions eroded at the hands of bad trade agreements designed to drive a race to the bottom. Many of the decisions were being made under the guise of "helping" the companies be more competitive. Code word for corporate greed.

Workers got caught on the losing end of a "one-sided class war."

This led to the Big Three closing or spinning off 65 plants in the past 20 years. In 2009, UAW members were unfairly villainized for all that ailed the Big Three. Our members, both active and retired, made massive sacrifices such as the suspension of COLA and job security language provisions, just to name a few. All these sacrifices bore by our members were made to help the Big Three stay afloat and remain "competitive," all to feed corporate greed.

Despite that, and the plant closures that tore apart communities, and how our members' lives turned upside down, our members always delivered.

With our recent success with the Big Three, our union just showed the world what's possible when workers unite to fight for more, fight against corporate greed. Workers win.

But only a small percentage of working-class Americans have the protections afforded by collective bargaining. Rather the vast majority are treated as second-class citizens, employed at the will of employers. We want better for America—and so should you. You should want better for Americans.

In the past six months, we have begun to turn the tide in that class war for the American worker.

On September 14, the UAW launched our Stand Up Strike. This was a new strategy to take on corporate greed at Ford, General Motors, and Stellantis, Chrysler's parent company. It allowed us to integrate our members into a national campaign where worker strikes strategically grew and escalated over time, giving our union's bargaining teams maximum power to negotiate and win a record contract.

For the first time in UAW's history, we struck at all three companies. And in less than seven weeks on strike, we won.

What started at three auto assembly plants grew to nearly 50,000 autoworkers going on strike at a time of soaring corporate profits and falling real wages. We said record profits mean record contracts. And that's what we achieved.

We won things in this contract that our industry hasn't seen in 15 years or more. We won victories that will instantly –overnight– change the lives of thousands of families across this country. Over time, it will transform communities, adding thousands of jobs and massively boosting the purchasing power of working-class families.

Never in our history have we negotiated the reopening of a plant. That all changed with this contract. Belvidere Assembly in Illinois was written off for dead when they laid off the remaining 1,300 workers. We not only got the company to reopen the assembly plant, but we also negotiated for a new battery plant. Both of these plants will add thousands of jobs to save the Belvidere community. That's what a union can achieve.

There's far too much in our agreement to detail in a short testimony, but I want to highlight four major areas in which we fought and won. In each case, we addressed a core, existential issue for the entire working class.

One, we raised wages dramatically for over a hundred thousand workers.

Two, we took a major step towards ensuring a just transition to electric vehicles.

Three, we improved the retirement security for hundreds of thousands of our members.

And lastly, we secured jobs for our current employees and future members and bargained for language that allows us to strike these companies if they do not honor their commitments to the workers.

In looking at the success of our contract, each gain is monumental, but it was only a first step. We won as big as we could, restored most of what had been taken away, in one contract, for only one workforce.

What we won has already begun spilling over into the non-union auto industry. After we announced our tentative agreements at the Big Three, Toyota made an announcement of their

own. As reported by Labor Notes, Toyota suddenly made the decision to shorten the progression to top wage for their workers and to give their employees a nine percent raise.

Over the weekend, Honda announced they had reduced their progression to top pay to three years and gave an 11 percent raise – the exact same first-year amount raise the UAW won at the Big Three.

We call it the UAW bump: that stands for “U. Are. Welcome.”

Every one of these workers is welcome in our union, to receive the full benefit of membership and working standards generations of UAW members have fought for and won. Already, thousands of these workers are reaching out and signing union cards.

We know these non-union companies are doing this because they’re scared. They’re scared that their workers will see that a better life is possible once they organize into a union. And these companies are trying to head that off.

For decades, non-union auto companies have used fear, uncertainty, and division to break union drives in our industry. I’m here to promise you that those days are over.

The American public overwhelmingly supported our fight against corporate greed at the Big Three. That is because the American public is fed up with an economy that works to the benefit of the billionaire class, not the working class. The American public sees their employers making out like bandits while workers are continuing to fall further behind.

The working class in this country is fed up and will not fall for the union-busting playbook of threatening to close plants, firing union activists, and pitting workers against each other.

We are organizing like hell to help thousands of autoworkers in this country, primarily in the South, to win their union and raise the living standards for the working-class.

The UAW just went on strike like we’ve never gone on strike before. Now we are going to organize like we’ve never organized before, because our strike has shown the Nissan worker in Alabama, and the Volkswagen worker in Tennessee, and the Toyota worker in Kentucky, and the Tesla worker in California that when union members win, the entire working-class wins.

Still, it is not enough for us to just win stronger contracts across the auto industry.

We have no interest in being a private welfare state.

Now, the working class needs this committee, and the entire Congress to step up. You all have an essential role to play. Not only in supporting our fights and other fights like ours. But to finish the job for economic and social justice for the entire working class.

We want the entire working class to organize, to bring dignity to their work, enjoy the fruits of unionism, and to have a voice on and off the job.

For that, we need the muscle of the federal government. Not just as allies cheering from the sidelines. We need a pro-worker Congress guided by a vision of liberty and justice for all. Elected leaders that understand that economic justice is a national security risk for all of us if people don’t have it, feel it. This is a fight worth fighting for. We must bring that fight into the workplace, as well as in the streets. But also, in the halls of power and the chambers of the US Senate.

The UAW won wage increases ranging from 33 to 250 percent over the life of this 4-½ year contract for our members. But the working class as a whole is suffering from horrifying income and wealth inequality. If the federal government is interested in addressing the economic crisis of the working class, they have to follow the UAW's lead and help make employers raise wages and benefits for workers everywhere.

We won electric vehicle and battery plants under our national agreements, maintaining our standards in the new auto industry. We were told it was impossible, even illegal. We were told the green economy had to be a race to the bottom, and there was nothing anyone could do about it. But UAW members rejected that false choice, that it can only be *either* green auto jobs *or* good auto jobs. **The UAW just proved that it can and must be both.** But if the federal government is interested in addressing the economic impact of a green transition, they have to follow the UAW's lead and ensure a just transition for workers everywhere.

We also won, for the first time in over 15 years, meaningful gains in retirement security for all our Big Three members and retirees. And yet one of the most harmful and divisive tiers in our union remains: those hired after the Great Recession still do not have a pension or post-retirement healthcare. If the federal government is interested in addressing the economic evil of retirement insecurity, they have to follow the UAW's lead and guarantee a secure retirement for workers everywhere.

These three crises – income inequality, the transition to a green economy, and retirement insecurity – are all linked. They are the fight for our future. What kind of economy will we live in? What kind of planet will we live on? And what kinds of lives will we lead?

Walter Reuther, the great UAW leader of the 20th century, spoke of our union as the American vanguard:

We don't mind leading.

We don't mind being the first to take action.

We don't mind striking for social and economic justice.

It is the duty and the privilege of the UAW to lead.

But we need reinforcements.

If this committee wishes to live up to its name, the HELP committee, it is time to help the cause of economic and social justice in this country by bringing the victories union autoworkers just won, and those we have yet to win, to the entire working class.

Thank you for having me today and allowing me to testify on behalf of the great members of the United Auto Workers Union.

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Submitting for the congressional record, along with:

- Biography of UAW President Shawn Fain
- Summaries of the Big Three tentative agreements [single pdf]
- News clips of non-union automakers replicating wage increases UAW members won

Biography of UAW President Shawn Fain

UAW President Shawn Fain is a 29-year member of the UAW. Hailing from a family of UAW members, Shawn got his start with the union in 1994 as an electrician for Chrysler at Kokomo Casting Plant in his hometown of Kokomo, Indiana. Two of his grandparents were UAW GM retirees and one grandfather started at Chrysler in 1937, the year the workers joined the union. Shawn is extremely honored to be a UAW member, and proud of his grandparents, so much so, that he always carries one of his grandfather's pay stubs with him as a reminder of where he comes from. Shawn is the proud father of two daughters and a super proud grandfather of two beautiful grandsons.

Shawn served his local union at every level from Education & Bylaws Chair to CAP Chair, to being elected to five terms as a Skilled Trades Committeeman, and Plant Shop Chairman for UAW Local 1166. During his tenure as local union representative, he was hardworking, persistent, and outspoken for all members of the UAW. In 2007, Shawn was anti-ratification due to the agreement implementing tiers and cutting wages for workers in half. He also stood against plant idling, plant closures and other divisive issues that workers have faced in the past 20-plus years. Many times, at council meetings, he was ostracized for speaking up against the agreements as they didn't serve the best interest of the Membership.

He was a UAW Negotiator in 2009, during the Chrysler Bankruptcy, and was elected again as negotiator in 2011. He became an International Representative for the UAW in 2012, where he continued to fight for a better standard of living for all UAW members. In 2015, he chaired the International Skilled Trades sub-committee; after the ratification of the 2015 Agreement, he spearheaded the efforts to defeat the very unpopular Conductor issue. Shawn has been a long-time fighter for the members on the plant floor, many times putting his own job on the line for standing up against vice presidents that wanted to implement policies that would have a negative impact on the membership.

Running as a reformer, the membership elected Shawn to the office of UAW President in the first-ever direct election for the UAW International Executive Board. He was sworn in as President on March 26, 2023, and since taking office, Shawn has been making headlines throughout the country due to his fighting spirit and willingness to represent the UAW membership at all levels.

In the "Stand Up Strike" contract campaign, Shawn led the nearly 150,000 autoworkers to negotiate a record contract that included 25% wage increases, restored cost-of-living adjustments that were taken away during the Great Recession and created the pathway for a just transition for workers in the electric vehicle auto industry, proving that worker strikes build power and lead to big wins for the working class.

An economic and social justice warrior, Shawn is deeply committed to making sure the UAW is a member-led union as we fight for what's best for our members and the working class. Shawn has set the goal to organize new auto manufacturing workers into the UAW, especially in the South, to bring UAW-level pay and safety standards to all workers in this country over the next four years.