

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

**Remarks at a United Auto Workers Picket Line and an Exchange With Reporters in
Belleville, Michigan**
September 26, 2023

The President. Hello, UAW! I marched in a lot of UAW picket lines when I was a Senator—since 1973—but, I tell you what, it's the first time I've ever done it as President.

Folks, look, one thing is real simple—I'm going to be very brief—the fact of the matter is that you guys, the UAW—you saved the automobile industry back in 2008 and before. You made a lot of sacrifices. You gave up a lot. And the companies were in trouble.

But now they're doing incredibly well. And guess what? You should be doing incredibly well too. It's a simple proposition.

Folks, stick with it, because you deserve the significant raise you need and other benefits. Let's get back what we lost, okay? We saved them; it's about time for them to step up for us. Thank you.

Now, there is a guy I know you don't know here, but I brought him along with me anyway. *[Laughter]* Shawn Fain, your president.

United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain. All right. Good afternoon, UAW family. I want to thank Local 174, "Home of Walter Reuther." Thanks to this local leadership and Director Laura Dickerson. *[Inaudible]*—the workers because you're all the reason we're here. This is all about the membership.

You know, this site, Willow Run, it holds a historic place in the history of our union and our country. You know, this was part of the "arsenal of democracy" during World War II. It's where they built the B-24 Liberator bomber. You know, that bomber, they built one of those per hour when they were at their peak. It's what helped us win the war.

So today, 80 years later, we find ourselves here again, with the arsenal of democracy. It's a different kind of arsenal of democracy, and it's a different kind of war we're fighting. Today, the enemy isn't some foreign country miles away. It's right here in our own area. It's corporate greed.

And the weapon we produce to fight that enemy is the liberators—the true liberators—it's the working class people. All of you working, working your butts off on those lines to deliver a great product for our companies.

That's how we're going to defeat these people. That's how we're going to defeat corporate greed is by standing together.

You know, this is a historic moment, the first time in our country's history that a sitting U.S.A. President has came out and stood on the picket line. Our President has chose to stand up with workers in our fight for economic and social justice.

So it's a historic day at a historic moment in time. You know—and just as today, you know, it's about the auto workers, who are part of the fabric of the working class of this country. We're the people that make the world run. It's not the billionaire class, not the elite few. It's the working class of the billions of people who have been left behind. That's what this battle is about—changing that.

You know, what's going to move this—it's not some executive that owns our future, it's us. It's working class people from all walks of life.

You know, it's what we decide to do together that's going to change and it's going to shape the future of this Earth and for future generations. And that's the economic reality that corporate executives don't want us to recognize.

I see these CEOs try to justify a system where they take all the profit and the workers are left to fight for the scraps and live paycheck to paycheck. That's got to end.

They say they deserve all the profit because they say they're different. You know what? They are different. They have different degrees. They have different responsibilities. They have different titles, different positions.

You know what? I agree, though. They're different. We—let's talk about some of that. These CEOs sit in their offices, they sit in meetings, and they make decisions. But we make the products. They think they own the world, but we make it run.

The CEOs think the future belongs to them. Today belongs to the auto workers and the working class. And the difference between them and us is, just as our theme song, "Solidarity Forever," says, "Without our brain and muscle, not a single wheel would turn."

That's what's different about working class people. Whether we're building cars or trucks or running parts distribution centers; whether we're writing movies or performing TV shows; whether we're making coffee at Starbucks; whether it's nursing people back to health; whether it's educating students, from preschool to college—we do the heavy lifting. We do the real work. Not the CEOs, not the executives.

And though we don't know it, that's what power is. We have the power. The world is of our making. The economy is of our making. This industry is of our making. And as we've shown, when we withhold our labor, we can unmake it.

And as we're going to continue to show: When we win this fight with the Big Three, we're going to remake it. In this union, the members are the highest authority. In this country, the people are the highest authority.

And so today I just want to take a moment to stand with all of you, with our President, and say thank you to the President. Thank you, Mr. President, for coming. Thank you for coming to stand up with us in our generation's defining moment.

And we know the President will do right by the working class. And when we do right by the working class, you can leave the rest to us, because we're going to take care of this business.

So thank you for coming out. Thank you for being a part of this fight. And let's get back to winning solidarity for all of our members and economic and social justice for all of our members.

The President. Folks, you've heard me say it many times. Wall Street didn't build the country, the middle class built the country, and unions built the middle class. And that's a fact. So let's keep going.

You deserve what you've earned, and you've earned a hell of a lot more than you're getting paid now.

Thank you very much.

[At this point, the President greeted UAW members on the picket line. He then responded to a reporter's question as follows.]

Contract Negotiations Between the United Auto Workers and the Big Three Automobile Companies

Q. Mr. President—Mr. President, should the UAW get a 40-percent increase?

Participants. Yes!

The President. Yes, I think they should be able to bargain for that.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:03 p.m. outside General Motors Co.'s Willow Run Redistribution Center.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : United Auto Workers picket line in Belleville, MI;
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