



Statement by Shawn Fain, International President, UAW, before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions for a hearing on *Workers Should Benefit from New Technology and Increased Productivity: The Need for a 32-Hour Work Week with No Loss in Pay*

March 14, 2024

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

I'm here to talk about one of the most important issues to any union leader, any working-class person, any US Senator, any human being. Our time.

As president of the United Auto Workers, I represent 400,000 working class people across industries, and 600,000 retirees. And I know when my members look back on their lives, they never say "I wish I had worked more." They never say, "I wish I'd made more money." They say, "I wish I had more time."

But time, like every precious resource in our society, is not given freely to the working class.

Since the industrial revolution, we have seen the productivity of our society skyrocket.

With the advance of technology, one worker can do what used to take dozens.

More profit can be squeezed out of every hour, every minute, every second.

There was a time when this phenomenon was supposed to lead to workers getting their time back.

Nearly 100 years ago, the economist John Maynard Keynes spoke of the future of workers' time.

His worry was that with all the gains in productivity, we wouldn't know what to do with ourselves. He predicted a 15-hour work week.

In my own union, I go back into our archives and read of the fight for the 30-hour week, an idea that was alive and well for many decades.

But deep into the 21st century, we find these ideas unimaginable.

Instead, we find workers working longer hours.

We find workers working deep into their 60s, 70s, even 80s.

And we find the associated deaths of despair from addiction and suicide, of people who don't feel a life of endless, hopeless work is a life worth living.

In our Stand Up Strike last year, we raised the flag for a 32-hour work week.

Countries across the world have it.

We know with technology, we can do more with less. It is the mantra we hear from management every day, and yet it never benefits the worker.

So, who is going to act to fix this epidemic of lives dominated by work?

Will the employers act?

Will Congress act?

How can working class people take back their lives, and take back their time?

I know what people will say. Maybe even people in this room.

They'll say: people just don't want to work. They'll say, working class people are lazy.

So, I want to close with this.

I agree there is an epidemic in this country of people who don't want to work.

People who can't be bothered to get up every day and contribute to our society, but instead want to freeload off the labor of others.

But those aren't the blue-collar people. Those aren't the working-class people.

It's a group of people who are never talked about for how little they actually work, and how little they actually contribute to humanity.

The people I'm talking about are the Wall Street freeloaders, the masters of passive income.

Those who profit off of the labor of others have all the time in the world.

While those who make this country run, who build the products and contribute the labor, have less and less time for themselves, for their families, and for their lives.

Our union will continue to fight for the rights of working-class people to take back their lives, and take back their time. We ask for your support in that fight.

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 longtime 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.