

Testimony of Steve Cochran
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Chattanooga, TN
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Good morning. Thank you to Chairman Cassidy, Ranking Member Sanders, and the members of this committee for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Steve Cochran, and I am a proud autoworker at Volkswagen in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

About a year and a half ago, my coworkers and I voted 3 to 1 to join the United Auto Workers.

A year and a half later, we STILL don't have a union contract. We are STILL waiting for the company to agree to a proposal that simply affords us our fair share. We are living with healthcare that forces people into bankruptcy. We are living with no protection from inflation.

The company has repeatedly violated labor law to delay us our fair share. They have unlawfully cut jobs at the plant. They have unlawfully refused to bargain in good faith. They have presented us with a quote-unquote final offer that maintains horrible healthcare, doesn't protect our wages from inflation, and makes no commitment to keeping good jobs in Chattanooga.

And this is a pattern from Volkswagen. Earlier this year, our brothers and sisters at the Volkswagen distribution center in New Jersey organized their union. But the company broke the law so extremely in their anti-union behavior that the National Labor Relations Board had to step in. Last week, the Board ordered the company to recognize and negotiate with the workers' union in New Jersey.

So we know this company and many other companies break the law.

We know it's possible to enforce the law and force these companies to negotiate with their workforce.

Why are we getting no support in Tennessee? Why does Volkswagen get to break the law to screw Tennessee autoworkers out of a fair wage and a fair job?

We've had to file federal labor charges against Volkswagen over and over again during these negotiations.

Volkswagen unlawfully cut jobs during these negotiations without bargaining with the workers. That's against the law.

Volkswagen has repeatedly gone back on their proposals and bargained in bad faith. That's against the law.

Volkswagen has intimidated workers for exercising their right to vote yes on a strike authorization. That's against the law.

We can talk about changing the law all day and night.

But if you don't ENFORCE the law to begin with, what's the point?

Your average worker has to fight like hell to win their union, against constant illegal activity from employers.

If they overcome that to win their union, they have to fight like hell to win a union contract and actually improve their lives.

This process can take years. And every year is a slap in the face to the workers who make these companies run.

I have worked at Volkswagen for 12 years. I show up every day and I do my job. I do what you Members of Congress all say you want: make high quality vehicles right here in the USA. I followed the rules and won my union fair and square with a National Labor Relations Board vote. I am providing for my family and contributing to my community.

I am doing my job.

The question is, why isn't the federal government doing its job?

All we are asking for in Chattanooga is a union contract. We are asking for a fair wage, healthcare that doesn't put you into bankruptcy, and basic rights that thousands of autoworkers already enjoy at Ford, General Motors, Stellantis, and at automakers across the world.

Volkswagen made \$20 billion in profits last year. And yet when it comes to doing right by American workers in Tennessee, they break the law with impunity. And the federal government refuses to act. And working class people in Tennessee pay the price.

There's no question that workers in this country need new laws like the PRO Act.

And if the Faster Labor Contracts Act were already the law, us at Volkswagen might have a first contract today.

But even if you can't pass those bills, you can still make the union-busting stop. You can fully fund the National Labor Relations Board so that it is able to do its job.

You can stand with us workers, who are your constituents, when management tries to stop us from voting for a union or exercising our right to negotiate.

You can tell corporations with one voice, loud and clear, that those rights are already protected in the United States of America.

So I ask this committee. Before you talk about changing the law. Understand that Volkswagen and many Fortune 500 companies like it are breaking the law every day.

I'm doing my best to provide for my family. I'm doing my best to build world-class automobiles. I'm doing my best to do it by the book, form my union, and win a better life.

When will Volkswagen do their job and follow the law?

When will the federal government do your job and enforce the law?

And when will working class people get a fair shake when they stand up for themselves?