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**NEWS RELEASE**

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**UAW VW Vote: Union Leader and Lifelong Chattanooga Resident Blasts Tennessee Governor and His “Corporate Cronies” for Interfering in this Week’s Union Election**

*IFPTE’s Secretary-Treasurer Gay Henson’s guest editorial in today’s Chattanooga Times Free-Press takes on anti-union Tennessee politicians and corporate elites for their hypocritical remarks regarding this week’s union election at Volkswagen’s Chattanooga plant.*

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. – In a guest editorial in the Monday, April 15 edition of the *Chattanooga Times Free Press*, the Secretary-Treasurer of the [International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers \(IFPTE\)](#) Gay Henson, who is a Chattanooga resident and a national labor leader, says Tennessee’s governor Bill Lee, along with other politicians and their corporate cronies, should butt out of the union election being held this week at Volkswagen’s Chattanooga plant.

While VW has taken a largely [neutral position](#) during the election period, Lee and others have relied on fearmongering. In response, Henson’s commentary can be found on the paper’s Opinion page, entitled [“Tennessee politicians and their rich buddies shouldn’t interfere with the union election at VW.”](#) The text of the commentary is repeated below:

**Opinion: Tennessee politicians and their rich buddies shouldn’t interfere with the union election at VW.**

By Gay Henson

Well, isn't that rich?

This week, Volkswagen workers in Chattanooga will vote on whether to join the United Auto Workers. To hear some Tennessee politicians and their C-suite buddies tell it, a yes vote will signal the apocalypse — rather than employees choosing to have a voice in decisions related to better pay, benefits and working conditions.

Gov. Bill Lee recently warned that VW workers "shouldn't risk their futures" by joining the union and urged them not to give up "the freedom to decide for themselves and hand that over to a negotiator on their behalf."

Well, bless his heart. Lee is a wealthy construction company heir whose family business, Lee Company, had annual revenue pegged at more than \$220 million in 2019, when he became governor. You think he's had any qualms about lawyers, economists, brokers and personal representatives negotiating on his behalf?

Ten years ago, then-Gov. Bill Haslam opposed an earlier VW unionization effort. He's now part of the Nashville Predators ownership group. It's fair to assume he's had some people in his corner when he bought into the NHL franchise. By the way, if you didn't already know it, the NHL players have a union.

A host of other politicians and their corporate cronies, people who have never worked on an automobile assembly line, also are inserting themselves into this week's vote, such as state Sen. Bo Watson who claimed that a no vote would protect "Tennessee values."

As a girl from Tennessee, I can tell you that "Tennessee values" means allowing capable local workers to decide for themselves on what's best for their future and if joining a union is the right call. The VW workers should be free to choose or not choose — without outside interference from Lee or others in his crowd.

Isn't it rich that politicians and their corporate pals, who have people at their beck and call, are saying that local autoworkers should be voiceless and at the mercy of a company headquartered thousands of miles away in another country?

The fact is that having a seat at the table is crucial for workers' rights. And, right now, Volkswagen's plant in Chattanooga is the only VW factory in the world where workers aren't represented by a union.

In Germany, not only is VW unionized, half of the seats on the very successful company's supervisory board — Germany's version of the board of directors — are filled by worker reps.

Lee's warning that unionizing plants could lead to plant closings is nothing more than a tired scare tactic. Unions help save jobs — and that's something I can attest to from personal experience. From 2005 to 2022, I served as president of the Engineering Association (EA), which represents 2,500 white collar workers at the Tennessee Valley Authority, including engineers, scientists and technicians.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the EA, which is affiliated with the International Federation of Professional & Technical Engineers (IFPTE), waged a successful campaign to block a management plan to privatize and outsource more than 200 TVA workers jobs to Ireland, France and India. It was because we had a union that we were able to beat back this job-killing plan and keep good-paying tech jobs here in Tennessee.

Opponents to unionization at VW are clearly nervous, and for good reason. The UAW has reported that a supermajority of the 4,000 VW plant workers in Chattanooga have signed cards in support of union representation. On top of that, the UAW last year won record pay increases for its workers at America's three largest U.S. automakers — General Motors, Ford Motor and Stellantis.

It's not just autoworkers who are looking to unions for representation. The IFPTE — where I now serve as one of the two top officials — represents smart folks, such as nuclear engineers and even NASA rocket scientists. But you don't have to be a rocket scientist to know that joining a union is a smart move.

**Across the United States and Canada, IFPTE represents 90,000 highly-skilled, workers in both the public and private sectors. The union is an affiliate of the AFL-CIO. More information can be found at [www.IFPTE.org](http://www.IFPTE.org).**

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