

Nelson Campaign: ICYMI: Journal Times highlights U.S. Senate candidate Tom Nelson pro-labor agenda

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APPLETON, Wis. – Outagamie County Executive and pro-labor populist U.S. Senate candidate Tom Nelson is standing in solidarity with UAW strikers as their company health insurance was cut off today. Nelson is outraged to see the lack of protection for strikers and vowed to introduce a bill in the Senate to ban companies from cutting health insurance from workers exercising their right to strike. Nelson tells the Racine Journal Times in an interview how important it is to him that elected officials make labor a priority. Nelson also linked the UAW strike to other labor uprisings around the country at Amazon, Starbucks and the Oshkosh Corp. postal service contract.

The Racine Journal Times quoted an outraged Nelson discussing the issue:

“There ought to be a law” banning companies from cutting off striking workers’ health care coverage.

I talked to the workers (in Racine); they are going to have their health insurance cut off on Friday. There ought to be a law. When I get to the U.S. Senate,” Nelson said, “I’m going to make a bill to make it illegal to cut union workers’ health care.”

The full article appears below:

The Racine Journal Times: “CNH to cancel striking workers’ health insurance; union says it is covering for its members”

Adam Rogan, Ryan Patterson | May 9, 2022

Mount Pleasant: CNH Industrial, which owns the former Racine-founded Case Corporation, plans to cut off unionized workers’ health care coverage starting Friday, May 13.

More than 1,000 employees are reportedly striking among Racine, Mount Pleasant and the Iowa city of Burlington after the last collective bargaining agreement expired and negotiations fell apart late last month.

The strike began at noon Monday, May 2.

UAW Local 180, which represents Racine area CNH (Case New Holland) workers, announced Saturday “Effective May 13th CNH Corporate has notified the UAW that they will be canceling health insurance to all its members.

“GM (General Motors) did the same thing during their strike (in fall 2019) and reversed course after the community backlash they received, John Deere never even considered this tactic (in fall 2021) but a multi-billion dollar company like CNH that would say they care about their employees’ well-being, well you know the old saying, ‘Actions speak louder than words.’ This is the time for our community to speak out and confront CNH!!!”

According to CNH, UAW knew this was coming. In a statement Monday, CNH Industrial said: “Before the strike started on May 2, 2022, representatives for CNH Industrial and the UAW spoke about how to handle healthcare coverage of striking employees during the strike. As a result of that discussion, both parties agreed that the provision of healthcare benefits would transition from being provided by CNH Industrial to being provided by the UAW. This transition will occur on May 14, 2022, resulting in no gap in coverage for striking employees.”

In an email, Yasin Mahdi, president of UAW Local 180, which represents Racine-area workers, responded to CNH: “I’m not going to go back and forth with them about this. They are in full control of the insurance and they can leave the insurance uninterrupted if they wanted to do so.”

A union spokeswoman said in an official statement Monday afternoon: “On May 2nd, CNHi notified the UAW of its intentions to cut off healthcare to the striking workers. The decision to do so was not a collaboration between the parties, but a sole decision of the company. Their (CNH’s) only inquiry was whether there would be a void in coverage prior to the UAW assuming healthcare coverage of our striking members if healthcare benefits were cut off on May 13th by the Company, to which the UAW responded that there would not be.”

According to UAW officials, striking workers are receiving \$275 a week (approximately one-fourth of median U.S. income) from the union.

Tom Nelson, a Democrat running for the U.S. Senate seat currently held by Republican Ron Johnson, said in a phone interview Monday, “There ought to be a law” banning companies from cutting off striking workers’ health care coverage.

“I talked to the workers (in Racine); they are going to have their health insurance cut off on Friday. There ought to be a law. When I get to the U.S. Senate,” Nelson

said, “I’m going to make a bill to make it illegal to cut union workers’ health care.”

Barb Mendez, a strike captain leading a picket line on Durand Avenue in Mount Pleasant on Monday, said the strike will continue anyway.

“We gotta do what we gotta do,” she said, noting that during a 2004 strike, health care benefits were not taken away. “It’s a little disheartening knowing that we’ve got over 700 people working here.”

Mendez, who has worked for CNH for more than 20 years across two separate spans, continued: “It’s pretty sad. It’s like a kick in the teeth to know that you come to a job you’re devoted to every day and then they want to take your insurance away from you because they can’t figure out what kind of contract they want to put together.”

In addition to Burlington, Iowa, and Racine/Mount Pleasant, only one other U.S. CNH plant has a union — in Fargo, North Dakota — a CNH spokeswoman confirmed in an email.

Those unionized in Fargo, organized with the Teamsters, are not currently striking, but did strike in late 2020 over COVID-19 concerns.

In a statement reacting to the news about health insurance being ended, Nelson said “This means war.”

Nelson, who is currently Outagamie County’s executive and stood with local

picketers Monday, continued in Monday's interview: "There has been a renaissance of labor organizing across the country, which includes Starbucks, Amazon and many others. At the same time too, there has been a wave of subtle union busting in Wisconsin."

He pointed to Oshkosh Corp. (a.k.a. Oshkosh Defense), which opted to fulfill a multibillion-dollar contract to build new vehicles for the U.S. Postal Service at a non-union facility in South Carolina instead of in Oshkosh where workers are unionized. He also noted other Wisconsin union shops, including Georgia-Pacific paper mills in Green Bay, that are closing operations, with Georgia-Pacific employees being able to stay with the Atlanta-based company only if they moved to non-union facilities.

Among CNH's alleged union busting techniques, according to Nelson, has been paying non-union workers more as a way to scare off non-union workers from organizing.

"If you're interested in running for office, and if you care about jobs and you care about workers, you need to make it a priority to show up for these workers," he said. "Make it an integral part of your platform."

In a tweet Saturday, Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers, a Democrat, said "I stand with the UAW members in Racine fighting for a fair contract and better wages. Wisconsin depends on skilled workers like the members of UAW."

Assembly Minority Leader Greta Neubauer, D-Racine, and Racine Mayor Cory Mason, a Democrat, were photographed with strikers last week and voiced support for a solution to come at the negotiating table.

Union officials have said the strike could take up to six months.

According to reporting from NPR, in 1964, 34% of Wisconsin workers were unionized. By 2008, that percentage was down to 15.1%. In 2014, it was down to 11.6%.

Neither CNH nor UAW has publicly stated what offers were on the table when striking began.

In a Facebook post last week, UAW Local 180 blamed “corporate greed” for the strike. The union cited CNH’s reported results for the first quarter of 2022, which included \$4.6 billion in revenue and an adjusted net income of \$378 million. In 2020, the company reported profits of \$1.76 billion, a 21% increase over the year prior.