

“Level Playing Field for Workers”

By Senator Gerald Allen

In the heart of Tuscaloosa County, Alabama, lies the Mercedes Automotive plant, a testament to the enduring partnership between international automakers and our great state. For 29 years, this facility has been a cornerstone of our community, providing 4,400 individuals with high-quality, good-paying jobs without union membership. Since its relocation to Vance in 1995, Mercedes-Benz has invested over \$6 billion in the Alabama plant, solidifying its commitment to our region. In 2018 alone, an additional \$1 billion was injected into the Tuscaloosa area, further demonstrating the economic engine that international automakers represent.

These companies are not merely contributors to our economy; they are vital components that generate over \$72 billion in federal, state, and local tax revenue. This revenue funds crucial public services such as infrastructure, education, and healthcare. International automakers play a pivotal role in meeting our transportation needs while simultaneously investing millions in cutting-edge research, advanced safety technologies, and the American workforce.

Alabama’s right-to-work law cannot fully protect workers from union overreach. Even when individuals choose not to join a union or pay dues, exclusive bargaining rights remain with the union, constraining workers under union contracts. That means the union will make all the career choices for each worker, rather than workers controlling their own futures.

The UAW sees this engine of economic growth and regards it as an opportunity to boost its membership numbers. The union has set its sights on organizing our Mercedes facility and other international automakers’ workplaces in Alabama. I believe every worker has the right to choose for themselves whether union membership is right for them. But foul play by unions puts employee rights at risk. And Alabama’s autoworkers deserve the full context of what joining the union could mean for them.

Above all, Alabamans should stand firm in championing workplace freedom, advocating for the right of workers to choose whether or not to join a union. This stance is crucial at a time when unions like the UAW are attempting to restrict worker rights, hindering the very freedoms that define our nation.

One such challenge is the encroachment on employees' right to a secret ballot. Unions often pressure employers into accepting card check processes, a method that subjects workers to public declarations and potential coercion. Despite the majority of employers insisting on supervised secret ballot elections, which preserve worker rights, unions seek legislative changes to mandate card check. The recent decision by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to favor cards over secret ballots raises concerns, as courts have consistently asserted that secret ballots best represent employees' true sentiments.

Equally troubling is the attempt to keep information from workers through so-called "neutrality agreements." Politicians and unions are pressuring employers to refrain from discussing the UAW or union membership in general, leaving workers with only the union's perspective. This not only contradicts the First Amendment rights of employers but also deprives workers of a comprehensive understanding of the choices before them.

Moreover, rank-and-file members of unions have no actual say as to how union executives spend the funds from the dues deducted from their paycheck. Unions are not obligated to allocate dues exclusively for workers' benefit, diverting substantial portions to union boss salaries and political contributions. Over \$1.6 billion in political contributions over the past eight years paints a concerning picture of funds that could have directly benefited workers but instead went to political causes many workers probably disagree with.

The collaboration between international automakers and Alabama has been a success story, fueling economic growth and providing meaningful employment opportunities. The current challenges to workers' rights demand our attention. As we navigate this landscape, let's prioritize the well-being of our workforce, ensuring they have the freedom to choose and access accurate information to make informed decisions about their future.

Senator Gerald Allen represents District 21 in the Alabama Senate.