

Dear Chairman Oberman,

My name is Aron Ross and I have been employed as a railroad employee since September of 2019. I am currently working as a diesel locomotive electrician apprentice in Argentine, Kansas. I am responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the locomotives while under the guidance of a journeyman electrician. I feel that my testimony should be shared as someone who is a first generation railroad employee and someone who is at the very ground level of this company.

I started my employment in September of 2019 and was excited to learn and provide the best service I could to my employer. In June of 2020 I was furloughed due to a few factors including covid complications for the company. I was not called back to work until January of 2022. I was only one of many employees furloughed during that time and upon returning I learned that most of my fellow coworkers opted not to return due to finding other employment with better benefits, better pay, better structure, and better opportunities overall. Also upon returning I learned that we have had a lot of employees from our shop quit due to the same reasons. Some of these employees had 10-20+ years of working for this employer. We have been working under an expired union contract for a few years now with no increases in pay or benefits and no penalties to the company. Our unions and leaders in the company have met on many occasions and cannot come to an agreement on our contract negotiations. This lack in pay and benefits betterment has caused many to leave and has kept new employees from applying. In our area tradesman in my specific craft make upwards of 25-30% more gross pay per hour. Those other higher paying jobs also offer better, lower cost benefits to the employees. This coupled with higher prices in almost every area of daily life and a jump in inflation that hasn't been seen in a very long time is causing massive numbers of resignations and furloughed employees not returning.

I love my job and the work I do but have been forced to tell people when I'm asked that the railroad is no longer a job with all the glimmer and benefits it once had. The habit of working in a contract that is expired is a common issue with the railroad companies and has become a norm. While this is happening employees are struggling to adjust to economical changes and end up having to look for other employment even if they loved their job or had been an employee for a long time.

I was taught to take pride in my work and to do all I can to put the best quality out of the shop that I'm able to. During these teachings we were taught what is acceptable and what is not. Recently due to the demand we are now being asked to push locomotives out the door that are in less than desirable condition and cause failures to increase across the board. While we are told to do this we are at the same time accused of pushing sub-par quality out of the shop when this is exactly what we're being asked to do.

Railroads have made record profits year after year while depleting the employee pool, deterring possible future employees, and lowering the standards at which we repair and operate these locomotives and trains. We only ask for our fair share of the pie and to be taken care of as we take care of the company's assets. Railroad jobs used to be some of the best, highest paying jobs with the best benefits. We took pride in our work, we loved our jobs and coworkers were like family, our insurance was free and now we are treated as number to be pushed to the side. We are offered payments or benefits that are nothing more than smoke and mirrors. When we go years without a contract and negotiate through our unions for better wages we are given back pay but are taxed heavily as the railroads claim them to be a gift rather than earned income. Another subject that needs attention is our available time away from work. We are forced to choose between our health and families or going to work. I had to work over a year to qualify for one week of paid vacation time and was offered no sick or

other paid time off. Because I was furloughed for over a year, I have come back to work only to realize that because I was furloughed for more than a year that I did not have the opportunity to work enough qualifying hours to earn my paid vacation for the year. I am once again forced to work an entire year with absolutely no paid time off to care for my family or health.

I hope that my letter reaches you and my concerns are heard as I represent the lowest level of employee employed by this company.

Sincerely,

Aron Ross

Apprentice Locomotive Electrician