

# Union Pacific one of 24 corporations donating to Trump's ballroom construction

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*On Sunday, November 16, at 3:00 p.m. US Eastern Time, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and the Socialist Equality Party (US) are holding an online public meeting to organize the fight against layoffs and hunger. **Register here to attend.***

Union Pacific (UP), the largest railroad company in the United States, is one of 24 companies that have donated to Trump's \$300 million White House ballroom. Union Pacific joins other major corporations like Amazon, Meta and Google in their direct financial contribution to the ballroom, though the exact amount given by UP is unknown.

While Trump demolishes the East Wing to make room for a grand, opulent ballroom, tens of millions are facing hunger in America due to his administration's cutoff of food stamps. The administration is using the government shutdown to dismantle social services and bring independent agencies under Trump's direct personal control.

The donation comes after a meeting between Trump and UP CEO Jim Vena to discuss the proposed merger between UP and Norfolk Southern, which Trump has made public statements supporting. At that meeting, Vena also discussed with Trump where next to deploy the National Guard in the United States. According to Trump, he suggested the president send troops to occupy Memphis, St. Louis and Chicago. Court battles have delayed the sending of troops to Chicago so far, although ICE is running rampant throughout the area.

Trump has indicated support for the merger, which would create the US's first single-company transcontinental railroad controlling 40 percent of the freight rail industry. But approval for the merger is not certain. Other major industries have expressed concern that the merger would allow for monopolistic pricing,

with the chemical industry being a leading voice against the merger.

In order for the merger to take place, it must meet approval from the Surface Transportation Board (STB), an independent regulatory body with board members appointed by the president and approved by the Senate.

The board typically has five members but currently only has three sitting members, two Republicans and one Democrat. Robert Primus, a Democrat, was fired without cause from the board by Trump earlier this year for not matching the president's "America First agenda." Primus was the only board member to vote against the merger of Canadian Pacific and Kansas City Southern in 2023.

Current board member Michelle Schultz and nominated member Richard Kloster, both Republicans, are undergoing Senate approval of their nominations. If both are approved, the STB would have a 3-1 Republican majority, with particularly close ties to the Trump administration and rail companies. While still nominally independent, the merger will almost certainly succeed or fail by Trump's word alone.

The personal role of Trump in regulatory affairs, bound up with his ongoing efforts to build a presidential dictatorship, was a significant factor in the donations for his ballroom. Consumer rights group Public Citizen found that 14 of the 24 corporate donors to the ballroom's construction are facing some kind of federal regulatory enforcement or have had that enforcement canceled by the Trump administration, including anti-trust and labor rights cases.

The report notes that these companies are seeking to curry favor with Trump to secure their financial interests and in doing so are "aiding Trump's authoritarian project." Union Pacific will be hoping their financial support to the ballroom will reflect

positively in the STB's decision.

"National security" interests will also play a role in Trump's decision. Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC) owns its own transcontinental railroad connecting Vancouver to Montreal, with connections to New York City and through the central United States into Mexico. As the US escalates the war against Russia in Ukraine, threatens Venezuela and Iran and prepares for war with China, considerations of how a US-based transcontinental railroad will assist the deployment of military personnel and armaments industry will gain significance.

These considerations are also connected to Trump's ongoing coup. His efforts to build a dictatorship are aimed at securing the rule of the oligarchy, and Union Pacific is seeking a prime seat at the table. Through the merger UP will become the dominant force in the freight rail industry. UP will certainly see its donation to Trump's ballroom as a modest down payment on securing its place among the core group of monopolies that will reap the benefits from Trump's consolidation of power.

Absent from this is any opposition from the rail unions. Not only are they silent on UP's outright bribery of a sitting president, but some are even openly backing the merger. The Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation union (SMART) publicly endorsed the merger earlier this fall in exchange for vague promises on job security. The National Conference of Firemen and Oilers also accepted a similar deal this month.

In contrast, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) rejected the deal and instead said that it would rely on its connections with the Trump administration to protect jobs during the merger. The BLET is part of the Teamsters, whose president, Sean O'Brien, is an outright fascist seeking to subordinate the working class to the capitalist oligarchy and secure his position as a loyal ally to the Trump administration.

This makes the union bureaucracies complicit in the coming jobs bloodbath, as the rail companies push for one-person crews and large-scale job cuts, and in Trump's coup, as they freeze the working class with inaction and adapt to Trump's fascist politics.

Union Pacific's contribution to Trump's equivalent of Versailles is an expression of the direct merging of the ruling class with the state, eliminating the last

pretenses of democratic forms of rule. Trump is building a dictatorial government of, by and for the oligarchy.

Only the independent mobilization of the working class in the fight against fascist dictatorship and for workers power, i.e., socialism, can stop the drive towards dictatorship.



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