

Union vote uncertain at Ky. EV battery plant

BY LIAM NIEMEYER
KENTUCKY LANTERN

The United Auto Workers claimed a narrow victory Wednesday night in a unionization vote at an electric vehicle battery plant in Hardin County, though the election's outcome remains uncertain because dozens of ballots have been challenged.

A spokesperson for BlueOval SK told the Lantern that workers voted 526-515 in favor of being represented by the union but that 41 challenged ballots had yet to be tabulated, enough votes to potentially change the outcome.

The National Labor Relations Board confirmed the tally Thursday morning and said the challenged ballots “are sufficient to affect the results of the election.”

In an emailed statement, the Detroit-based union claimed a “hard-fought victory” and “a major step forward for workers who stood up against intense company opposition and chose to join the UAW.”

The union said the chal-



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The Blue Oval SK complex in Hardin County manufactures batteries for electric vehicles. It began operations last week.

lenged ballots were “illegitimate” and represented “nothing more than an employer tactic to flood the unit and undermine the outcome.”

“We will fight these challenges to defend the democratic choices of these workers, as we always do when corporations try to interfere with workers’ democratic choice,” the UAW wrote. “The challenged ballots are not part of the group of workers who built their union from the bottom up. They deserve

to have their own union, in an appropriate bargaining unit with a representative of their own choosing.”

The union in its statement, issued shortly before midnight, called on Ford Motor Co. to “acknowledge the democratic decision of its workforce” and “drop their anti-democratic effort to undermine the outcome of the election.” BlueOval SK, a massive complex along Interstate 65 in Glendale, is a joint venture between Ford Motor

Co. and South Korea-based SK On.

Mallory Cooke, a spokesperson for BlueOval SK, in a statement said the outcome of the election would depend on the National Labor Relations Board’s decision of whether the challenged ballots will be counted.

“BlueOval SK will urge the board to count each eligible vote because every voice matters,” Cooke said. “We remain focused on the safety and wellbeing of our team and our commitment to build best-in-class batteries together!”

The preliminary vote must be certified by the National Labor Relations Board to become official. The agency fields and reviews potential objections to ballots and election conduct before certifying the result.

The votes cast over Tuesday and Wednesday culminated a nine-month campaign by the UAW to unionize the electric vehicle battery manufacturing complex, which began production last week. State officials previously described the complex as the “sin-

gle-largest economic development investment in state history” that would employ 5,000 people when a second planned plant becomes operational.

If the UAW is successful in the election, it would mark another victory for the union after successfully organizing other electric vehicle battery plants including most recently in Indiana. The UAW’s efforts are part of its broader push to unionize electric vehicle battery plants across the country, although organizing in the South has been more challenging.

Tensions had flared leading up to the election between the UAW and the BlueOval SK over workplace safety issues, and the union called on the National Labor Relations Board last month to investigate what it alleged was a “scorched-earth” anti-union campaign by BlueOval SK. The company had denied assertions from workers about workplace safety and had dismissed the UAW’s call for an investigation as a “dishonest tactic.”

CDC gets new acting director as leadership turmoil leaves agency reeling

NEW YORK (AP) The nation’s top public health agency was left reeling Thursday as the White House worked to expel the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention director and replace her with a top adviser to Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

The turmoil triggered rare bipartisan alarm as Kennedy tries to advance anti-vaccine policies that are contradicted by decades of scientific research.

Two administration officials said Jim O’Neill, a former investment executive, would supplant Susan Monarez, a longtime government scientist. O’Neill worked at the Department of Health and Human Services under President George W. Bush, but he does not have a medical background. The officials requested anonymity to discuss personnel decisions before a public announcement.

A flashpoint is expected in the coming weeks as a key advisory committee, which Kennedy has reshaped with vaccine skeptics, is expected to issue new recommendations on immunizations. The panel is scheduled to review standard childhood shots for measles, hepatitis and other diseases.

Two Republican senators called for congressional oversight

and some Democrats said Kennedy should be fired. He is scheduled to testify on Capitol Hill on Sept. 4.

No explanation given for CDC director’s ouster

Kennedy has not explained the decision to oust Monarez less than a month after she was sworn in, but he warned that more turnover could be coming.

“There’s a lot of trouble at the CDC and it’s going to require getting rid of some people over the long term, in order for us to change the institutional culture,” Kennedy said at a news conference in Texas.

The White House has only said that Monarez was “not aligned with” President Donald Trump’s agenda.

Monarez’s lawyers said she refused “to rubber-stamp unscientific, reckless directives and fire dedicated health experts.” She is fighting her dismissal, saying the decision must come directly from Trump, who nominated her in March. The president has not said anything publicly about the matter.

Monarez tried to block political interference, departing CDC officials say

The saga began Wednesday night with the administration’s

announcement that Monarez would no longer lead the CDC. In response, three officials — Dr. Debra Houry, Dr. Demetre Daskalakis and Dr. Daniel Jernigan — resigned from senior roles at the agency.

The officials returned to the office Thursday to collect their belongings, and hundreds of supporters gathered to applaud them as they left the Atlanta campus. There were bouquets of flowers, cheers and chants of “USA not RFK.”

Daskalakis, who resigned as head of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, said, “I fear that children will be hurt by poor decision making around vaccines.”

“You cannot dismantle public health and expect it to still work,” he said.

Jernigan stepped down as director of the National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases and Houry quit her post as the agency’s deputy director and chief medical officer.

Houry told The Associated Press that Monarez had tried to guard against political meddling in scientific research and health recommendations.

“We were going to see if she was able to weather the storm. And when she was not, we were done,” Houry said.

Dr. Richard Besser, a former CDC acting director, said Monarez told him that she had refused orders to fire her management team. He also said she refused to automatically sign off on any recommendations from Kennedy’s handpicked vaccine advisers.

“Dr. Monarez was one of the last lines of defense against this administration’s dangerous agenda,” said Besser, now president of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which helps support The Associated Press Health and Science Department.

Trump admin. asks military base near Chicago for support on immigration operations

CHICAGO (AP) The Trump administration asked a military base outside of Chicago for support on immigration operations this week, offering a clue of what an expanded law enforcement crackdown might look like in the nation’s third-largest city.

The Department of Homeland Security asked Naval Station Great Lakes for “limited support in the form of facilities, infrastructure, and other logistical needs to support DHS operations,” Matt Mogle, spokesperson for the base 35 miles (56 kilometers) north of Chicago, said Wednesday.

The request came weeks after the Republican administration deployed National Guard troops to Washington, D.C., to target crime, immigration and homelessness, and two months after it sent troops to Los Angeles.

Although details of the administration’s plans for Chicago are scarce, city leaders said Thursday that they are preparing for multiple possible scenarios, from troops assisting in immigration arrests to patrolling in the streets.

“We don’t want to raise any fears,” Police Superintendent Larry Snelling told reporters. “We don’t want to create any speculation around what’s going on.”

Chicago leaders want more communication

City leaders said Thursday that the White House hadn’t contacted them about its plans, and a spokesman for the Illinois National Guard said the base hadn’t received requests regarding a Chicago mobilization.

Mogle, the base spokesman, said no decisions had been made on the request, and that the base hadn’t received an official request to support a National Guard deployment. The Chicago Sun-Times first reported on the request to the Navy base.

DHS did not confirm whether it had asked to use the base. But it said in a statement Thursday that it was working to make “our streets and cities safe again.”

Mayor Brandon Johnson and Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker have pushed back against a possible mobilization, saying crime has fallen in Chicago and that the city doesn’t want or need the military’s help. They are planning to sue.

City leaders said workers were circulating know-your-rights cards in neighborhoods with heavy immigrant populations, which offer tips on what to do in case of an encounter with an im-

migration agent. Other workers were checking in on Chicago’s homeless encampments and providing information about shelters since Trump has pushed to move homeless people far from Washington.

Snelling asked for more communication on plans involving law enforcement.

“To make sure that we’re not stoking fears through neighborhoods and we don’t have people running scared and it doesn’t create chaos on our streets, we’re willing to have those conversations,” Snelling said.

Many Chicagoans are on edge about the rumored deployment. Former President Barack Obama, who is from Chicago, weighed in Thursday, posting on X: “The erosion of basic principles like due process and the expanding use of our military on domestic soil puts the liberties of all Americans at risk, and should concern Democrats and Republicans alike.”

Obama’s Transportation secretary, Pete Buttigieg, a former U.S. Naval Reserve intelligence officer who trained at Great Lakes, said in a post of X that he never imagined the station could be used “for surveillance and enforcement activity on American soil. Our military was not set up to cater to the whims of a would-be American dictator.”

The politics of a deployment

Pritzker, a potential 2028 Democratic presidential contender, has spent days showcasing parts of the city where crime has fallen and said there is no emergency in Chicago requiring military intervention. He told The Associated Press that the presence of troops could worsen the situation.

Speaking to reporters Thursday, he suggested that it’s a political ploy, not a law enforcement strategy, that Trump will pull out during next year’s elections.

“This is a part of his plan to do something really nefarious, which is to interfere with elections in 2026,” Pritzker said. “He wants to have troops on the ground to stop people from voting, to intimidate people from going to the voting booth.”

Trump has often singled out Chicago, likening it to a war zone and “hellhole.” Chicago’s long-held status as a so-called sanctuary city has irked the Trump administration, which used Chicago to kick off a nationwide crackdown on immigration weeks after Trump’s second inauguration.

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