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Welcome to the MBP Intelligence Briefing. I'm Ben Woodfinden, Director of MBP Intelligence and Senior Advisor at Meredith, Bose and Coulton Phillips. Every week, we bring you unique and exclusive insights into the ideas, policies, and events shaping Canada's political landscape. From trade and fiscal outlooks to the decisions influencing business, governance, and public life, we bring context, experience, and perspective from people who've worked inside government, policy, and politics. MBP Intelligence is not punditry. We deliver targeted, actionable insights that help you give strong advice or make quick, informed decisions. Whether you're leading an organization, shaping policy, or simply curious about how complex decisions get made, this is your exclusive MBP Intelligence Briefing.

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Exclusive, where we bring you the exclusive insights of a special guest. And what a great way to kick this off today. I'm thrilled that we're joined by Lana Payne, national president of Unifor, just by way of bio here for Lana. Lana was the first woman to be elected national president of Unifor in 2022, and was reelected by a landslide result by Unifor members just a few months ago. And I think it's fair to say Lana is undoubtedly one of the strongest, most vocal fighters and voices for Canadian workers, and has led some big victories, including anti-scab legislation, which is now in federal law. Lana sits on the advisory council for Canada-US relations and has been a tireless advocate for Canada's auto workers as they're facing down the threats from south of the border. And she works tirelessly with business leaders and government officials to protect jobs in this country and fights to improve working conditions for all Canadians. So, Lana, thank you so much for joining us. Thanks for having me. It's a great way to end my day in Ottawa. Why don't we get straight into this then? And I think the best way to start, sadly, is the sad and troubling news this week out of Brampton. So, just for listeners' context, if they're not aware, so Stellantis announced it would shift production of the Jeep Compass from its idle Brampton plant to Illinois as part of a "13 billion dollar effort to increase US manufacturing." This Brampton plant has been inactive since 2022 and was halted.

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When retooling was halted after

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announcement of 25% tariffs on imported cars, over 3,000 unionized workers remain laid off and the plant's future remains uncertain. And I'll just know quickly that Stellantis has received around \$15 billion in Canadian subsidies to support its various plants and EV battery operations in recent years. So, Lana, let's get started here. You've talked about the need to fight Trump and the threat he poses to our auto industry. So, let's dig into this. What can we actually do in concrete terms?

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levels of government be doing? How can we actually in real terms fight back?

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Well, first of all, on the Stellantis news this week, I would say to you that this was an egregious and perhaps the most blatant example of a corporation doing something to appease Donald Trump right now in terms of deliberately going about shifting investment and jobs out of Canada. Investment and jobs, by the way, that we negotiated in 2023 with Stellantis at a bargaining table. And that is a commitment that we expect them to live up to. And so, one of the ways that we can push back against Trump is actually collectively in this country with our union, with all levels of government, making sure that we're pressuring and playing hardball with corporations who think that they can shift our jobs and that there won't be any consequences for this. But obviously, the priority here is to make sure that we're getting them to a table and that they're feeling the full weight of what it is the federal and provincial governments can do. And of course, they made commitments to both those governments as well. You mentioned off the top about the subsidies that they received. It's not quite \$15 billion. They have to actually produce things in order to qualify for some of that subsidy. But up to this point, federally, we're probably looking at about \$2 billion that has flowed to Stellantis. And that means we have to make sure that the people live up to their commitments. And I think that we can do this because I will tell you the risk of not winning here and not forcing Stellantis to do what they committed to do is that we could end up with a snowball effect. And the pressure on other automakers then to also shift production out of Canada without facing consequences will become very real. So, we are very close to having and being in a situation where General Motors has announced the end of the third shift at Oshawa. That loss has been delayed now. So, initially, we were to lose that third shift in October. We have been kicking up Holy Hell over this and now pushed until January. So, we want to make sure that we get that pushed out and that GM actually lives up to their commitments to us, which was that that third shift would be in place for the entirety of the collective agreement. But you can see the problem we would have if Stellantis is able to get away with their egregious actions this week, which is why I'm in Ottawa today talking to all the people that I need to talk to about what it is that they need to do to protect Canadian jobs and Canadian workers. Lenna, tell me more in going into some concrete terms on how we make these companies fulfill their obligations. Well, specifically Stellantis. Actually, let's leave aside GM for a minute and let's zero in specifically on Stellantis because that's the crisis that faces us right now. What are the tools in the government's toolbox? Yeah, I mean, government's pretty powerful if they decide to use leverage, you know. There's no doubt about it. One of the things that we proposed early on in the trade war is that government developed basically a tariff remission strategy with automakers. So, if you build in Canada, if you live up to your commitments and your investments and your footprint in Canada, you wouldn't face retaliation as a result of what was occurring. And so, in other words, you get an exemption from paying tariffs, but you had to live up to that. And there's a review process that happens, I think, every quarter to make sure that these companies are living up to what they promised and under that tariff remission program. So, this is basically a carrot stick approach that we can engage in. Obviously, I believe that governments have to... Like, the world has changed. It's changed so dramatically. It used to be that we would never take a position where we would play too much hardball with corporations in this country. You would use carrot stick, but not necessarily too much stick. And I think what Trump is doing right now is if you don't play that game of putting pressure on corporations to keep production in Canada, there will be no patriots here. Nobody will care about Canadian workers and

Canadian jobs. They have to feel the heat from us just as much as they're feeling it from Donald Trump. And that becomes a lot of charming, congoing, convincing, and threatening. And I would say that there's a lot that can happen. Our prime minister is a powerful voice in the world. He can have very difficult conversations with CEOs about what it is they should be doing here. And I think that we have to do that. We have to do all the things. And obviously, there's legislation on the books if we want to go to one end or to one extreme that can punish companies that make decisions here that hurt Canadian workers. And then there are Canadians themselves who I believe are still red hot mad at companies that think that they can do this and red hot mad at Donald Trump. And the reality is they've been doing things organically and collectively, whether it's to buy a Canadian, supporting build Canadian, all of the things not traveling to the United States, all of the things that Canadians have been doing. And Canadians can punish corporations who have brands. And they should be aware of that.

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There's also the other reality, and that is these companies sell a lot of cars into Canada. Galantis builds a lot of cars in the United States that we buy from them in Canada. And

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that's a privilege to get into our market to be able to do that. And you should live up to being able to have that privilege. And that means building in Canada and living up to your commitments. So if you're going to sell here, you need to build here. What's the role of the provincial government in all this, in this specific crisis right now? B.M. Ford's been playing a very constructive role, I would say to you. He's saying the things out loud that others probably won't. And I think that that's incredibly important. He shoots from the hip. He says, "Look, you guys, this is not good. I don't like it. And we expect you to do other things here." I mean, look at what he did when Diageo announced that they would basically shift production of Crown Royal, which is a Canadian whiskey, out of Ontario and to the southern United States. He made a very big threat. And that threat is, "We'll take this stuff off the shelves." And that may not be things that in the traditional sense that folks like. But honestly, we're fighting for our lives here right now. And we need more people saying and doing things like that. We have leverage and corporations have to understand that they can't get away with some of the things that they would normally get away with, that the world has changed and they've got a change with it, which means keeping jobs in Canada or facing consequences. A.B.B. I'm just pushing that a little bit more. So I think it's clear that, well, the Prime Minister and Premier Ford have been largely aligned, I think, for the...until quite recently. There does seem to be a bit of a divergence now, right? The Ford strategy is increasingly calling for to fight, to push back, as you're saying. I don't know that you can say, at least in terms of public rhetoric, that the Prime Minister is doing quite the same thing. Do you get the sense that there is a bit of a divergence here? Do we need to see more from the Prime Minister on this? Do we need to see more...last week he was at the White House and on one hand you can understand why he might be needing to play nice with the President, but is that playing nice coming...if he's not accomplishing anything,

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maybe Ford's onto something, right? Do you get the sense that there is a bit of a divergence here?

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A.B.B. What I would say is I think that there's been a shift in the last couple of weeks and months, and I think it's been obvious that we have provinces kind of pitted a bit against provinces here. We have the Western provinces saying one thing around Canola. You have Doug Ford saying something else around Otto. I do think in the beginning it was very helpful and still is, that you have a Premier who is being very robust in saying that we need to fight back and push back hard and use leverage, like if it means we stop sending electricity. Like he has said all of the things, and I think that that is helpful to the federal government in a strategy because it shows that the Prime Minister is feeling pressure in other directions to be able to do things here. Right now though, I think there needs to be an additional effort to make sure that we have a very strong Team Canada approach, and that means making sure that people like me and people in industry and folks who have a lot at risk right now are

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in a structure to make sure that we're able to feed good information to the government to support them in their efforts in negotiating strategies, because sometimes it's not clear what that strategy is, and I think it's important while we don't necessarily have to have every detail of what's happening at a negotiating table. I'm talking about industries and companies and union leaders who represent a lot of workers who have a lot at stake right now who need to feel confidence that we're taking the best and the strongest approach. And I've been, I guess, I think purposely critical of what happens if we negotiate some sectors and others are left till later. Are we using up our leverage too early? I think that these are valid questions, and I think it's important to have that kind of a robust discussion. Everything is at risk at the moment. The industrial economy of Canada is at risk because Trump has been very clear. He's coming for our auto jobs. Auto is so incredibly important and as a foundational industry

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how we build things in Canada, how we get technology in place, how we do all of the research and development, it supports so much in that regard, and getting to the advanced tech side of things too. So yeah, I think that there is a bit of a shift, but I also think that the federal government will move to try and pull people together right now because this is, I would argue, a critical stage at the moment. And I say that because today as we're chatting, the Prime Minister was meeting with Doug Ford in Ontario, and I think that that's very important. And keeping players in the tent and strong is going to be critical in the days and weeks ahead, particularly if we're getting close to side deals. Yeah, that's an important point. This also happened last week, but I don't think we can avoid it. So I think there's some people would like to keep their heads in the sand on this. The Trump administration, and not just the administration, but Trump himself, right, they've explicitly signaled over and over again that their goal is to shift auto manufacturing to the US. This is not just about some vague aspirational things. They have a concrete goal here. Secretary Lucknick, of course, last week said this at a what was supposed to be Chatham House, and hundreds and full of hundreds of people, including a couple of premiers. I do wonder what he was thinking there, but he explained- Well, I wonder this about him often, actually. What is he thinking? Yeah. But he explicitly signaled that he basically sees us as we have to come second to America and then tries, well, you get to come second. We have to come first, but you still get to come second. To go into a room full of Canadians and say that, there is some just shocking arrogance, if you ask me. But it's quite clear, this is an existential threat. This is not just some sort of a quick trade war. There are hundreds of thousands of

jobs in an entire industry is a threat here. And the Americans, they do not care. They want to take these jobs and they want to take these value added manufacturing, especially. Some people, I think, are still keeping their head in the sand on this, but at some point when they say something over and over again, you should believe them.

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Yeah. And I think, Ben, if you look at all of the things that the president has said since this trade war started, the one thing he's been consistent on has been the auto industry, to a point where he's making it extremely difficult for the very companies that operate and employ hundreds of thousands and hundreds and hundreds of thousands of Americans to actually do business right now. It is such a kind of

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to saying that we want to have more manufacturing in the US and making it extremely difficult for these companies to do things by charging them billions and billions of dollars in tariffs. And for some of these companies, it's the tariffs on auto, it's the tariffs on steel, it's the tariffs on aluminum. They're paying through the nose on all of it. And so that's one thing. But that also means that's the kind of fight we're up against. And that's why it's incredibly important to say on these other things that the US needs, if you're going to get them, you have to leave the auto industry alone. We have to be able to have a kind of integrated industry here, but also for Canada, we have to look down the road because we cannot get caught in this situation ever again. So we need to get through this moment, we need to protect the jobs that we have here. And then we have to think about how do we grow the Canadian footprint in terms of auto. And I think that there's a way that we can get there. But that's why it's incredibly important to make sure that if we're negotiating on aluminum and on steel and on energy, critical minerals likely going to be next in terms of what it is that the US is looking to access from Canada, then we better make sure that we're also protecting our industrial economy in that process. And that is the kind of trade off in this case. And of course, we are also coming up on Kuzma negotiations. And the reality here is that the US could do a lot of odd things here. They may opt out of that agreement. I hope that they don't. I think that that would be very bad for them the same way that it would be bad for us. But these are the things that we have to be prepared for. And the auto industry is worth fighting for. And I'm not saying that just because we have a lot of people who work in that industry. I'm saying that because if we want to have an industrial economy in Canada, we need an auto industry. We need an auto industry that supports the steel industry and supports the aluminum industry and supports all of these other sectors. And we can't just be a place where we export raw materials and help somebody else build up their economy. We have to build up our own. And part of that is, yes, having a strong auto sector, but it also means looking at how we build industrial policy in Canada to have a more resilient and, I would say, independent economy as much as we can. Obviously, we're still going to trade with the United States. How that trade happens is likely completely different now than it has been for generations. But there's still going to be a lot of goods going back and forth across that border. So shaping that, but also making sure we don't get caught into this situation ever again, where our dependency is so tied that we are now in a spot where we have to reinvent and build Canadian infrastructure, which we should have been doing all along, I would say to you. But the reality is, if we want to have a country where we can move and shift and transport people and goods safely and smoothly across this country, we have to invest in that. And that means strong industrial policy

to get there, no matter what the good is. So, Lana, we're going to talk, I think we want to get to future of auto industry, but I just want to stick on the trade negotiations right now, just for a moment. Because we have heard in the last week or two from folks like Goldie Heider from the Business Council of Canada that Canada doesn't have any leverage and we should go along to get along. And that's kind of the end of the conversation. What is our leverage in auto specifically? I'm really glad that Goldie isn't negotiating for us. That is what I would say, because if he thinks we have no leverage, he should not be anywhere near a negotiating table. We have tons of leverage, tons of things that the US needs. They can't build things without us at this point. Despite the fact that they have a 50% terafine aluminum, they can't build things without Canadian aluminum. And it would take a very long time for them to get to a place where they could create smelters to produce their own aluminum to the capacity that they would need it. And then we all know that they don't have the energy or the water to be able to do that. So, the reality is, if we decided to stockpile certain things, that's a lot of leverage. If we decided to do things like Doug Ford has proposed and cutting off electricity, that's leverage building in Canada and making sure that we are protecting critical minerals and making sure that these things are not owned by American companies, I think is really important in this moment. So, looking at foreign ownership rules on things that we need to protect, all of that, I think is really important right now. And we can do things without having to necessarily have an overt tariff retaliation, although I've been a fan of that, as everybody knows. There's one tool in the toolbox, but there's lots of other things that we can look at too. And the reality is, is when you're in the kind of economic war that we're in right now, you have to be willing to put those things on the table. And I think what we're hearing from Goldy is a position that I hear often from Bay Street, and that is, you know, a deal at any cost. Well, a deal at any cost means you're sacrificing 500,000 jobs dependent on the auto sector, 300,000, 400,000 jobs in the forest sector. You know, these are real jobs, real people, real communities. And I happen to care a lot about that. And others, you know, want the security of a deal. And in this moment, I would say to you, we're dealing with a president where a deal one day is not necessarily a deal the next day. So they shouldn't be so torn up about signing something that they think is real. The other thing is, if you're Goldy and you're Bay Street, they want to see the resources flowing. That's where the money is for them. And they get to make money on both sides of the border when those resources are flowing. So I think we have to understand what's at stake and what's at risk and where people are coming at it at this argument. And yeah, they're not negotiating, thank God for us. From a seasoned negotiator.

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Yeah.

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industry. Is it time for a Canadian auto producer? So you know what, we should not dismiss this idea.

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Other countries are doing this now. It's something that, you know, we should consider. But what I would say to you is that we also have bigger fish to fry right now. So we have to get this moment taken care of. And then, in the meantime, also look at how we go forward. But we also are in a situation where we import a lot of vehicles in Canada from parts of the world where they don't have a footprint in Canada. So we sell a lot of Hyundai in Canada and they have no footprint in terms of vehicle production. There are things that we can do here in our negotiations with other parts of the world. And because the situation with Trump has forced us to have different conversations with different countries now to

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our trade, to build defense, to do all of the things that you've seen the federal government focus on at this moment. That means we can have real conversations too about what we can build together with them, which we hadn't been doing as much before. And I think that that's really important because we can build a lot of things with a lot of countries right now. And because we have so much in Canada, we are rich in resources, we are rich in so many things, let's use that to make sure that we're bringing investment to Canada and creating long-standing relationships that result in good paying union jobs here in this country. Yeah, let me just put some stats out here for the audience here. So last year,

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29 million passenger vehicles were produced in Canada and about 1.1 million of those were exported to the United States. Currently, most of our vehicle exports go to the United States. But also last year, Canadians bought 1.86 million new motor vehicles. 200,000 of those were assembled in Canada and the rest were imported globally. There's a couple of lessons to be learned from that, right? One, we are currently dependent on the US for exports.

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That could change. And they're dependent on us to buy their cars. Exactly.

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majority of cars we import come from the United States. There's other places as well, of course. That 200,000 assembled in Canada, there's definitely room there for more cars bought in Canada to be made in Canada, right? And you're obviously not going to want to get to a point where we're autarkic and the only cars made here are produced here. That's not viable, but there's definitely room for growth there, whether it's different export markets. And we keep talking about the need to diversify, but this is something concrete, right? There's a direct, obvious, natural shift that we can make here in some ways. And then also just buying more cars that we make here. These are not simple questions. It's not like you can just click your fingers and change that. For all the talk of how we have no options here, there are some options there, right? Yes. There's lots of options. And it means looking at how do we actually kind of grow the footprint in Canada at the moment. And we were in a place where this was happening. So prior to President Trump being elected, we were on a growth trajectory in the auto industry for the first time in a long time. Supply chain was growing. We were building battery plants. There was a lot of investment happening in Quebec. We were building a Canadian auto industry. And by that, I mean, the resources going into the EV transition

were coming from mines in British Columbia and components coming from Quebec and just a different perspective in terms of how the auto industry was going to look. And in Canada, we felt we had to get, at least from our perspective as a union, that we had to get in the game of this EV transition, or we would get left behind. And by getting left behind, that would have been very, very problematic. And now all of North America face this problem because the reality is that one policy, two policy, three policy changes in the United States have resulted in less emphasis on trying to transition a part of the auto industry so that there are options. Yes, you get your ice truck. Yes, you need that. But you also need to have affordable EVs. And we should be building them here in Canada. We should have all of the options being covered off. We should build hybrids too. And we were getting close to that. And then the change in the United States means now the North American automakers have retrenched a little bit on this transition. And what I fear, and this is something I have said to them directly, is you want to be very careful here because soon, very soon, China is going to eat your lunch. And that is the problem that we have at the moment. China is producing so many cars, so many cars that they can't even sell in their own country. They're basically filling up lots over there of unsold, brand new cars. And they're desperate to get these cars into the world marketplace. And once they do, it changes the game on what it is that we build and whether we have an auto industry anymore and whether we have manufacturing. And then what does that mean then for steel and aluminum? Steel is already facing a massive challenge in this country because of what has occurred in China in terms of their capacity in the steel industry. This is something we have to be aware of and concerned about and plan for and not just shake it off as if, "Oh, yeah, we'll deal with that 10 years down the road." No, we have to deal with that now. Well, let me... You've opened an interesting line here. Let me play a bit of... Dear. ... for a second. So, we're talking about the Chinese auto industry here and just the kind of... It's incredibly remarkable growth, right? And the Chinese can do some things at scale now that are... You don't have to love everything they do to just respect the kind of the sheer awe of the power. It's incredible. It's industrial policy on steroids.

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And so, one of the... We're talking about EVs here specifically. Obviously, we have these tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles right now. Let me play devil's advocate here. I'm not explicitly advocating for this. I just want to throw... What if there's... Is there a world where 20 years from now, maybe we're making BYDs in Canada and they're being made with Canadian steel or material, something like that. Do you think there's a world where the way that... Especially, I think it's undeniable that part of the reason we've got our own reasons for having these tariffs on Chinese EVs, but we also partially did this right to try and keep ourselves aligned with the Americans. And if the Americans don't want our cars, maybe there's a case for us looking elsewhere.

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To be clear, I'm playing devil's advocate here, but is there a world where there's BYDs being made that plants in Ontario in 10, 20 years from now? Could that be the future? I think that China has an auto pact right now. So, if you want to sell in China, you have to have a plant there. And that works really well for them because they get to share technology, but they get to learn from people who've been building cars for a very long time. China is hugely advanced in so many ways here, and we know why they are. I mean, the amount of subsidy that goes into their industries is incredible. What I find most kind of ridiculous about even where we are on this right now is, on the

one hand, the US says that their biggest concern is China. And on the other hand, the actions of the President of the United States are pushing a lot of nations towards China. So, he's actually not achieving kind of the goal here in terms of what they would say they would want their China policy to look like. It's the exact opposite. And China is just sitting back and saying, "Okay, you want to play this game? We'll play it too." And you can see what they're doing right now. They're playing this very well at the moment. And every time they are threatened with something, they are very crafty in terms of how they come back at the US administration. And I get it. They're bigger. They can do a lot of things differently. But I guess the reality is, we could be in any situation 10 years from now. It's hard to read the tea leaves. What I would push for is to say, if you're selling cars in Canada, you need to build in Canada. And you should be building in Canada in unionized plants, because that's how we keep the wages and benefits up for that sector. And honestly, what we do in the auto industry and the kind of collective agreements that we have been able to achieve, including the last one, which was an incredible round of bargaining for our union, it helps workers through the whole supply chain. What we do there, we then replicate in the auto parts sector. We have Toyota and Honda, which are not unionized, although a lot of their supply chain is unionized with us. They basically pay what we negotiate. But if you don't have great union density in that sector, that would never happen. And so these would not be the kind of good jobs that we have in Canada. They would be something completely different. And I think that that's the reality that we have to also look at. I would say to the government, if you're looking to bring investment in whatever that investment looks like, whatever the companies you're learning here, there should be conditions to the kind of support that you're giving investment. And that is that we have good paying jobs and these companies can't be anti-union, like we've seen with Amazon, for example, in Quebec, that if workers want to unionize, that they need to unionize. And you can't take an overt stance where you're making it very difficult to workers to be able to have a union and use their collective power to change their conditions of work. So yeah, there's a lot we could do right now. And what I would say is the world is really different. So I'm going for the whole thing, all of it. So, Lana, let's kind of go over to labor politics now and the stuff that really gets people off their feet on the convention floor and giving you the standing ovations that you deserve and that you definitely got in the last convention and when you were reelected with a large majority of support from members. And that's the right to freely associate, to bargain, and then to withdraw labor.

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that bargaining is not in good faith or going the way that workers democratically decide that they want it to go. So we have a right to strike in this country established in the 2014's Scatron Federation of Labor Supreme Court decision, which essentially said, you know, you have a right to free association. And that means that you can't really freely associate it if it means nothing if you can't at the end of the day withdraw labor.

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Correct. And so what has happened since then though is that the governments used a clever little trick, this one clever trick, as they say on the internet, in section 107 to legislate folks back to work or order federal industry either back to work or back to binding arbitration in some way, shape, or form. Yeah. So we've seen now that famously used with flight attendants with their Canada very recently and people didn't like it. It certainly got a lot of public criticism. What should happen with section 107

and how should the government proceed on this? You bargain for a lot of folks in federally regulated industries. Yeah. We have about 70,000 members that are covered under federal jurisdiction. So the labor code, so they get to benefit from that anti-scab legislation that we were successful in having, I will tell you unanimously supported by parliament, which was I think an incredible feat given that this would not normally happen. To see all parties, the conservative party, the liberals and the Democrats, the bloc come together to support that was amazing. I don't know if we've seen much of that ever. And I think that that speaks to,

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get to your question in a second, but it does speak to- It's all part of the same package. It's all part of the same package. It speaks to the fact that political parties are chasing the working vote. And I think that that is incredibly important and that gives us power. So keep doing that political parties. We want you to come looking for our votes. This is great. But with respect to 107, what I would say to you is this is a very dangerous path to go down. And it's dangerous because what is happening is employers are being conditioned to think that they do not have to bargain fairly and freely because they have an out. And that is if I don't like things, I can just go to the federal government and they will have this card in their back pocket and they will invoke 107 on my behalf. So that creates a real problem in terms of trust in the labor relations system. And so workers then become conditioned not to trust that the employer is giving them their best offer. And so they always think that the federal government is going to intervene. So this causes a complete breakdown in how it is that you can reach what can be and should be a collective agreement at the bargaining table. Sometimes yes, a collective agreement at the bargaining table while there is a strike underway, like we had with DHL this year. And I will say to you, this is a private corporation who has many competitors in Canada and they too wanted the federal government to invoke 107 on their behalf. I said to the labor minister, when hell freezes over, like do not do this or the fight that you will face will be great because the reality is, is that this company has been dragging out bargaining for eight months right now to get to this exact place, which is to

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enforce concessions on our members. And our members were adamant. We had a 97% strike vote that they were not going to take these concessions. DHL is a very hugely profitable corporation. They did not need these concessions from our members, but they had a global plan and we might've had something to say about their global plan. And the reality is, is that they, you know, they locked out our members thinking that underestimating them, underestimating our union, and then going to the federal government and saying, oh yeah, we, we locked them out, but now you want, we want you to put them back to work and send this thing to binding arbitration. I'm like, no people, this is not how this happens. This is not collective bargaining and do not allow a corporation to get away with this silliness. And in the middle of the dispute, of course, anti-scab legislation came into effect. And, and that meant the, the, the replacement workers that the company was using, they had to stop doing that. And as soon as that happened, real bargaining started happening. The replacement workers went home, the company came to the table and realized, okay, we got a bargain, a collective agreement. And of course, we also knew that we had to bargain a collective agreement because we can't be on strike forever. So here we go. Both sides are feeling pressure to get a deal and, and a deal was made and it was ratified by a healthy margin. So that is collective bargaining. And that is the way it should work. What has

been happening over here is another set of problems. And I, you know, I think there needs to be a discussion on 107. That is for sure. I'm happy to be part of a table that, that has that discussion with, with, with the, with the federal labor minister or whoever wants to convene a table around this. But what I will tell you is using 107 like this will not bring you labor piece. In fact, it will do the opposite and it will prolong workplace problems. So just because you may get an arbitrated agreement, that doesn't mean the workplace is better as a result. Those problems will persist and they will show up again the next time you go to bargaining. This is the, this is the thing. Labor relations, often the issues that end up at a bargaining table, people who don't bargain might not know this, but it's relationship stuff. It's not always wages and benefits. It is what is happening in that workplace and how the relationship is working. The strike we had with this, the seaway last year was or year before, perfect example of, you know, yeah, we shut the seaway down for the first time in 55 years. And I said to the labor minister at that time, I said, do you really think that this is on us right now? We haven't had a dispute in this workplace in 55 years. Where do you think the problem is? And once you dig into it, the problem wasn't really about money or wages. It was an employer who for a very long period of time was, we were winning every arbitration, every workplace grievance, all of this, and they were not enforcing it. So the relationship in the workplace was a complete disaster. And the only way sometimes you can fix that is by doing the things that you do. And yeah, we worked at a resolve and no one invoked 107 against us. Maybe I scare people that don't invoke 107 against Unifor.

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But the other thing is we bargain a lot of collective agreements. We have 2500 to 3000 collective agreements. Come on, we know what we're doing. We're professional at this. And we know how to get an agreement. We know how to be,

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be really good at this because we're really good at it. I employ some of the best negotiators in the country in this union. And they know what they're doing. Does the government need to obviously convene that table? Does it need to establish some tests or some steps at a very minimum before it uses 107? Because the other, because this is going to go through the courts, right? Regardless, does the government need to do that proactively so that there's a bit better visibility for what the rules of the road are in bargaining? Because we are in a time of higher inflation and therefore you're going to get increased monetary demands at the bargaining table. In addition to the other working condition items that always come up at a bargaining table, do you think that now is the time to clear up when and where they use it? So now you want me to bargain with myself here, which I tend not to do because the reality is, is I think the starting position here is you don't get to use 107 and that this is a problem. But yeah, you're going to have to bring people together to figure out what needs to be done here. And the reality is not every set of negotiations is the same. There should be an understanding because in the federal jurisdiction, we have the mediation and conciliation department, which does a lot of really good work. And there can be checks and balances that you build in along the way. For example, do we all believe that it should take eight months to get a collective agreement on a renewal agreement that is mature? I will tell you no, but that is what happens when you have six lawyers on us and they contract out their bargaining to somebody else and we end up in a dispute because things are messy. Yeah. The conversation needs to happen. Do I want to wait 10 years for this to get to the Supreme Court to be tested? No, I'm pragmatic when it comes to these things. And I'd rather we get into a situation where workers can trust the

system and where employers can't get away with what they've gotten away with. Like Air Canada thinking, I mean, the guy wasn't even shy about it. He said on TV, well, yeah, we were expecting the government to invoke 107. Like, come on. Yeah. That'll tell you, did they get their best offer across if they thought that that legislation was going to be used for them? I would say no. And we're going to the bargaining table with them next. So here we go. Coming up on time here. So let me selfishly move this to slightly different territory. And, Len, I want to ask you about broader kind of trends to do with kind of working class voters, blue collar voters, whatever different term you want to use, shifting towards conservatives. And the last federal election, which full disclosure, I worked on the conservative campaign,

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we did quite well. I think we surprised some people, didn't surprise us internally, but we did quite well with, quote, blue collar workers. And we picked up some seats, right, where these voters, these people are concentrated. And that included some ridings where Unifor has a large membership. So, you know, there's this broader trend going on where these voters are shifting to the right. But what I'm curious about is talk to me about how your members see the current political reality, what you think is going on there. I'm sure you and I kind of have a whole separate conversation about this, but. This would be like a great podcast on its own, Ben, I would just say to you. This is something that, you know, obviously Unifor has a kind of unique position in terms of politics, because we want to talk about issues with our members when we're in elections. And I think, you know, we don't endorse political parties. I don't believe in giving up the power of our union and over to a political party. I think that we have to build our own power and have our own influence. And I think we do that and most times very successfully. And we also have a strategy here is we don't want, because there's always going to be ebbs and flows in politics, the

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stripe is going to change. And we don't want to be in a situation where unions and the things we care about are under attack all the time. And I think what we have to do is to make sure that it becomes really toxic to attack the things that we care about. And I think you saw, particularly with the start of the Erno Tool era, a real attempt in that campaign, I would say to you, to lean in more to the things that unions kind of cared about. There were no direct attacks on unions in that platform. There was an attempt to say things like, oh, let's put worker and union voices on corporate boards and all sorts of things. So there was this notion that we have to build some bridges here. And I think you saw that even grow over the last number of years. Certainly in the last federal election, everybody was wooing union voters. Like it was, it was full court press, we want to talk to unionized workers. And I actually don't have a problem with that. I think it's important for all political parties to care about the things that working people care about. And I don't want to have to fight about basic things like union rights and women's rights and equality and all of the things that matter to us as trade unionists. And I don't want to have to fight about the fact that we should have good health and safety laws in this country and that those are the things that we fight for every day. We should be having other types of robust discussion, but there should be things that are just basic things in Canada. And for the longest time, we were fighting over really even the rights of unions to exist. And I think that the conversation has evolved because I believe the Conservative Party has said, "Yeah, that's not a winning strategy for us. So we got to figure this out." And figuring it out means that you can't directly attack unions. So that's a win in some ways,

isn't it? I mean, and supporting anti-scab legislation, all of those things, the reality is, and I know that Pierre Poliev went to quite a number of uniform workplaces prior to the federal election. I know that our members asked him about his previous position on things like right to work and all of that. And I think that that's important. And it's good that they're asking those questions. Let's do that. For the first time, we had what we called an economic plan. We always have some version of an economic plan for the country that we want

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talk about, A, with our members during the election, but B, with Canada, generally, and Canadians generally. And our position was clear. We have an idea about how this economy should work for working people. And we invite every single political party to adopt what we see here and to agree with us and whether in all parts or parts of it. And I think that that's what we need to do. We want to make sure that people understand what we need to make this economy work for workers. The man. And by the way, we've always had members of our union that have voted Conservative. And in many parts of the country, Conservative parties have delivered good things for working people. I come from a province of Newfoundland and Labrador. And if you go back a long way, you would see that a lot of the labour legislation that we got in that province was brought in by progressive Conservatives. I ask you one quick follow-up on that, and then we'll wrap this up here. But as you said, the union membership has never been homogenous, right? In many ways, it's certainly not in voting patterns. But there is still this shift, right? It's not just a Canadian thing. It's gone on in other countries too. Do you think there is something broader going on there? And do you expect it to continue? Do you think this is just kind of a weird aberration? You're on the ground in this day and day out. What is your read of what's going on? And do you think it's largely a kind of an overhyped story? I think it's related to the things that working people care about. And it's largely bread and butter issues at the moment. And we went through a period of COVID where bread butter issues were really important. And we went through a post-COVID period where bread and butter issues were really important. They were losing purchasing power. They weren't able to afford a home. All of these things. I have a 24-year-old daughter. She never thinks she will own a home. And I believe that the Conservatives were really smart in terms of tapping into the things that people were talking about. And maybe, Ben, that was you, because you understood that this is what people care about. And that is largely what is going on. Maybe there's something broader happening. I talk to our members every single day. And I do a lot of workplace visits. I am very much hands-on a national president. I like to know what our members are thinking and doing and saying, because I think I'm a better leader when I do that. And the reality is, is those were the exact things that they cared about. And so they felt they were being heard. Someone is talking about housing. And I care about housing. Somebody is talking about inflation. And I can't afford groceries. These getting through. And of course, you guys have been kind of brilliant about how you use social media platforms and all of that and understanding algorithms and all of the things. So kudos. You're doing this around the world.

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rest of us have got to catch up. I think I'm caught up. But you know what I'm saying. This is it. You're in the places where people are. I will say that we also don't want to be careful that we're using good, that people are still getting good information. Because I do have a fear of, and we represent a lot of media members, and they do incredibly important work to not just

report the news, but make sure that we've got a healthy democracy. And I think the spread of misinformation on some of these platforms is very dangerous right now. And I think that we all have a responsibility, Ben, to make sure

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doesn't happen.

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there are lots of things that we can do. I'm not talking about limiting free speech or any of those things. But I think that just wrong information that also could be dangerous to people's health is something that we need to think about in terms of how potentially we look at these platforms and regulate them or govern them or do whatever we need to do. That's a whole other podcast, I know.

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Yeah, I think we've got multiple, multiple follow up podcasts working out here now. So we'll leave it there. But, Lena, thank you so much for joining us. And yeah, you've given us opportunities here to have you back. So I hope you'll come back again. I will. But you know, there are a lot of Canadians that you can interview. And I'm sure there's some great ones that would do a much better job than I've done here tonight. And I would say I love it. I love people talking policy and caring about big ideas and building big

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