

International Brotherhood of Teamsters General President Candidates Forum

**Moderator:
Rebecca Rainey
Politico**

Candidates:

**Sean M. O'Brien
IBT General President candidate on the
O'Brien-Zuckerman Teamsters United Slate**

**Steve Vairma
IBT General President candidate on the
Vairma/Herrera Teamster Power Slate**

**Location:
Mirage Hotel
Las Vegas, NV**

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*Transcript By
CastingWords*

Rebecca Rainey: Good evening. I'm Rebecca Rainey, a labor reporter for POLITICO based in Washington, DC. But tonight, I'm in Las Vegas, Nevada, where I will be moderating this debate between the two candidates vying for a five-year term as General President of the Teamsters Union.

This debate was organized by the independent Office of the Election Supervisor for the International Brotherhood of Teamsters -- Brotherhood of Teamsters. The Office of the Election Supervisor oversees the union's election process. Early next month, ballots will be mailed to Teamsters members in the United States and Canada, where the vote will count – the vote count will begin on November 15th.

The first rank-and-file membership vote for the top officers of the Teamsters took place in 1991; and the union conducts officer elections every five years. The Teamsters Constitution requires the officer election to be supervised by a person who is completely independent of the union.

Richard Mark is the Election Supervisor, and he is here with us this evening. Mr. Mark also served as the Election Supervisor for the 2004, 2011, and 2016 Teamsters officer elections.

Let me now introduce the two candidates for Teamsters General President and my colleagues on the panel of journalists who will be asking questions tonight.

Representing the Teamsters United slate is Teamsters International Vice President East Sean M. O'Brien. He is a fourth-generation Teamster and President of the Local Union 25 and Secretary-Treasurer of Joint Council 10, both in Boston. Welcome, Mr. O'Brien.

Sean O'Brien: Thank you very much.

Ms. Rainey: Representing the Teamster Power slate is Teamsters International Vice President at Large Steve Vairma. He has served as Secretary-Treasurer of Local Union 455 in Denver since 1996 and is President of Joint Council 3, which represents members in eight states. Welcome, Mr. Vairma.

Steve Vairma: Thank you.

Ms. Rainey: Let me now turn to tonight's panelists. To my left is Caroline O'Donovan, who covers workplace and technology issues for BuzzFeed. She is based in San Francisco. To my right is Sarah Jones, a senior writer at "New York Magazine" who hails from the Big Apple and covers issues related to workers and inequality.

We have a live audience here in Las Vegas, including many Teamsters Union members, some of whom have been attending a Teamsters Women's Conference in this hotel.

Everyone in the room has shown proof of having been vaccinated for COVID-19, and the audience will be wearing masks throughout the debate.

This debate is also being streamed on the web on YouTube and Teamsters' Facebook channels. We have a number of credentialed journalists present, as well. Welcome all.

In addition to questions from our panelists, those in the room can submit questions in writing by filling out the cards that have been supplied and passing them to Jamie Horwitz, who is standing in the front row of the room now. Jamie, please raise your hand so the audience can identify you.

Tonight's debate, the second of two presidential candidate debates this year, is an opportunity for thousands of Teamsters members, as well as the news media and general public, to hear from the two rival slates and their top candidates. Whomever wins the election this fall will introduce a new era for the powerful union.

Candidates, you know the rules. Each candidate will have two minutes for opening statements. The order of opening statements has been determined by a coin flip a short time ago.

Mr. Vairma will make the first opening statement and also the first closing statement. Mr. O'Brien will receive the first question.

When we begin the question and answer period, as moderator I will direct the flow of all questions and recognize each panelist, alternating between candidates. The candidate to whom the question is presented will have 90 seconds to respond. The other candidate is given 45 seconds for rebuttal or comment.

The candidate first questioned will then have 30 seconds for rebuttal. If I think an answer needs further clarification or follow-up, I may allow an extension of discussion or direct one of the other panelists to continue the line of questioning for an additional 45 seconds.

Following the question and answer period, each candidate will have two minutes for closing statements. We have a timekeeper in the room. The candidates and the panelists can clearly see the time displayed. When time is up, if the candidate is still speaking, I will stop the answer to keep the debate moving.

I may let a candidate complete a sentence when time is up, but we're not going to start fresh thoughts.

Finally, let me remind all audience members not to engage in any outbursts or action that may take away from speaking time. This can keep – this can lead to sanctions from the Election Supervisor for the audience member, the candidate, and the slate.

With that, let's begin with the opening statements. Mr. Vairma, we begin with you.

Mr. Vairma: All righty, thank you.

It's hard to believe we just started this journey just 19 months ago, and yet here we are down to 64 days left in this election in which our membership has to make a decision. And they have to decide what direction we're going to bring this union forward. How we're going to have this transition as we move forward to a new era in the Teamsters movement.

You members, you have a tough decision to make. You have to make this decision knowing the weight of the International Union is on all of our shoulders. And it's about the rank-and-file. It's about this membership and what this membership feels and values going forward into the future.

I believe that the Teamster Power Slate is the slate of choice. I believe that the Teamster Power Slate brings with it great diversity, great vision, and great leadership as we move forward. This is a historic time in this International Union. It's an opportunity for us. An opportunity for us to do something historical by electing the most diverse -- the most diverse in industry, gender, and race of a team of individuals prepared to lead this Union.

And why is that important? It's important that we look and reflect the people who we represent. It's important that this Union understand that we are an all-inclusive Union, that the members see themselves as they go forward and as we take on the tough battles like an Amazon, take on the tough battles and the fights of major corporations, and taking those on.

We have the team that could get that done. It has proven leadership. We have done it time and time again, whether it's taking on corporate giants like Sysco and US Foods, taking on those battles, organizing, organizing smart and smart and operating smart as we move forward and as we take on these big battles with these great corporations.

Ms. Rainey: Mr. O'Brien, your opening statement?

Mr. O'Brien: Good evening, Sisters and Brothers. I'm honored to be here today as your candidate for the Teamsters United O'Brien/Zuckerman 2021 Slate. We have an election in front of us. We have a choice to make. There's only one choice that has to be made, and that's O'Brien/Zuckerman 2021.

We have to -- more now than ever, we need to make certain that this international union, our rank-and-file members, are united cuz the true fight is not going to be between us. Cuz this is going to be over in 64 days. The true fight is fighting corporate America, fighting politicians, and fighting anybody that wants to tear down our great Union.

We have a 118-year history of fighting for working men across this country and in North America. And we're going to continue to do that. And I think OZ 2021, is a slate. We, too, have a diverse slate. We, too, have the ability, whoever wins this election -- Again, I think it's going to be Teamsters United, O'Brien/Zuckerman 2021 -- it will be the most diverse executive board we've ever had in the Teamsters Union.

But I don't take diversity lightly. Matter of fact, at our last debate and during my opponent's acceptance speech, he called the diverse members on my Slate "tokens," which was offensive, and he didn't own up to it. I hope he's here tonight to truly support diversity, truly support a new direction, and truly support the poor choice of words that he used.

Now moving forward, once this election's over, I will have no problem reaching across the aisle and working with Steve Vairma or anybody else. Cuz the one thing we have to understand, that the power of collaboration is truly going to effectuate change in the Teamsters Union moving forward.

Ms. Rainey: Thank you. Let's now turn to our panel. Caroline, let's start with you. The first question goes to Mr. O'Brien.

Caroline O'Donovan: Thanks. I wanted to open talking about an issue that you brought up in your opening statement and that both sides have brought up during the campaign, which is the threat that Amazon poses to the Teamsters Union.

Today, Amazon announced that they would be raising their minimum wage for new hires to \$18 an hour. I've been in conversation with some of the members in the halls here today, and there is an obvious anxiety about Amazon hiring members and what that's going to mean for the Union.

You, Mr. O'Brien, I think in a previous debate mentioned -- questioned why the Teamsters hadn't had a stronger strategy on Amazon in the years past, but both of you have spent time serving in Teamster leadership. So I guess my first -- first part of my question is how did we get to this point with Amazon being, you know, so far ahead out of the gate? And what is the strategy for dealing with Amazon from both of you going forward?

Mr. O'Brien: Well there's no secret that Amazon's going to be our most formidable opponent moving forward, not only just in the parcel delivery, but now they're in the food distributionship. And I think, like the current administration and my opponent, who actually runs the warehouse division, that oftentimes we were reactionary, not proactive.

And we need to organize Amazon. There's no question about that. We need to organize Amazon. We need to organize those workers. We need to engage the community. We need to engage local government to ensure that they understand how important it is to uphold community standards such as the UPS agreement, the DHL agreement, and any other agreement that could be affected by Amazon.

It started out as a 20,000-person book club that has grown over the last 10 years to a 400,000-person global economy, basically. And you know, my opponent will sit here and tell you how he's got this plan, but he can't tell anybody about it because he doesn't want to give the secrets away.

There's no secret that this should have been a vision 10 years ago. This should have been a vision to organize these workers. And you know, unfortunately, we look to blame other people for our problems, but the true meaning of leadership is taking on the tough fights, and that's what you're going to get with us.

Ms. Rainey: Mr. Vairma, your response.

Mr. Vairma: Yeah. So again, you know -- Sean, you sat on the executive board, and I didn't see you doing anything during your past nine years of trying to -- to project a proactive program with Amazon.

And yes, part of Amazon belongs in the warehouse division, but it's also the airline division. It's in rail. You know, Amazon touches every aspect of our Union. And it has taken a while through our strategic campaigns to build a program, which we now have done.

We have set up a division that's now dedicated and focused on the Amazon project, and that's a program that's being spearheaded currently by Randy Korgan out of Teamsters Local 1932. And he does have a plan, and I've seen the plan, and our General President has seen the plan, and

we've agreed that this is the best course of action to engage the public, to take them on on every level.

Ms. Rainey: Time. Do you have a response?

Mr. O'Brien: Yeah. I would love to see that plan, but true to the leadership and Steve's style, there's no transparency inclusivity. I've been fighting Amazon for 18 months in my own Local Union, and Randy Korgan can attest to that.

So, if he wants to stand there and say he's seen the plan, typical leadership. If you don't fit with the administration and you don't get along with the administration, you are excluded. That will not happen moving forward under our administration.

Ms. Rainey: Do you have any response to that?

Mr. Vairma: Yeah. Once again, Sean, I mean, you have seen the plan. Randy Korgan has shared his vision of how he's going to move forward with the Amazon project.

He's been sharing this program via PowerPoint presentations to joint councils all across this country, as he's trying to get local unions to work in coordination with each other to adopt a disciplined program to take on a corporate giant, like we have with Amazon.

That's what I've been doing for my whole career. That's what I've done in the warehouse division, is you bring strategies like this together, you bring people together to take on a coordinated fight when you bring on big carriers.

Ms. Rainey: Time. Do you have any response?

Mr. O'Brien: Why did you wait 10 years? Why'd you wait six months prior to the election to roll out this plan?

Ms. Rainey: And with that, we're going to turn to our next question. Sarah.

Sarah Jones: Thank you. We're here today at the Women's Conference. Both slates would diversify the leadership of the Teamsters. Mr. Vairma, beyond putting women in leadership in the Teamsters, how would your slate improve the day-to-day lives of women Teamsters?

Mr. Vairma: Well, I think that that is what's important on the creation of our slate was to be able to put people into power that are already leaders and who are accomplished leaders in their own rights.

These are individuals who have, in fact, run local unions, run major projects. They have – and they have excelled in their own crafts. And by having this team of individuals on our slate, it gives us an opportunity to address very critically – critical issues that our members face day to day.

Currently, the makeup of our membership in this International Union is 35 percent women. It's important that we have that voice and a voting voice at the table with us to deal with these issues and address people's problems.

Problems that we have found out under COVID-19 got really exacerbated as we had to deal with issues that we normally hadn't had to deal with at the bargaining table.

These individuals are able to help me shape that future, make sure that at the bargaining table, we address their concerns, because I don't believe this will be the last pandemic we face. There may be other pandemics in the future.

And we better have a team in place that's prepared to address these issues, address these problems, and help excel our folks going forward, and protect our members.

Ms. Rainey: Mr. O'Brien, do you have a response?

Mr. O'Brien: Yes. I have great women representatives on my slate. And you know, Steve, I think that your thinking is a little convoluted, because I think the strongest people in our union don't necessarily have to be elected and run off -- local unions.

I think you would agree that the strength of our union is in our rank-and-file members. However, I got two women on my slate that do the job day in and day out. They've held various positions in the local union.

And again, for you to sit here and, again, disrespect, disrespect the diversity of my slate with Lindsay Dougherty and Joan Corey is unacceptable. You do not have to be the head of a local union to be an effective leader, especially as a woman in this organization.

Ms. Rainey: Your response.

Mr. Vairma: Yeah I can't help on how you interpret things, you know, Sean. The bottom line is, I didn't insult anybody on your team. I'm talking about my team and the people who I put in place.

And let's go ahead and talk a little bit about the insult at the beginning of this thing on your misrepresentation and your lie about what I said and about why you have people wearing face masks today about calling people tokens and having an insult to that -- to those individuals. That was never aimed at your team.

Now -- both statements, and if you go back and look at the video -- and thank goodness there is a video, because it tells the truth -- what I said is my team, my individuals are not tokens.

Ms. Rainey: Time.

Mr. Vairma: My individuals on my team...have

Ms. Rainey: Time. Your response.

Mr. O'Brien: Steve, you said it. I didn't. 9 minutes and 57 seconds...

Mr. Vairma: Not tokens.

Mr. O'Brien: ...into your acceptance speech...Excuse me, I have the floor.

Mr. Vairma: Not tokens.

Mr. O'Brien: Excuse me, I have the floor. Anyways, you said it, I didn't. And then when you were questioned about it, when you were told language matters and you couldn't answer the question, you couldn't even respond, you said it was a poor choice of words, or something to that effect. You said it, I didn't, own it.

Mr. Vairma: It may have been a poor choice if it offended the moderator, but it was never aimed at your team. The facts bear out. The facts will bear out. The proof is in the pudding. We have the video, you know what I said, let's don't misrepresent what I said. I said, "Not tokens."

Ms. Rainey: Okay. Moving on to the next question, Mr. O'Brien, President Joe Biden announced last week that he was instructing the Labor Department to issue a rule requiring companies verify the vaccination status of their employees or require them to submit to weekly testing.

During the last debate, you both made very clear that you support encouraging your members to get vaccinated, but that vaccine mandates should be a subject of bargaining. You and I know bargaining is not easy and it does not – you know, it's not a short process.

How does that square with your position that members should get vaccinated, and as soon as possible? And how do you plan to approach this forthcoming vaccine mandate from the Labor Department?

Mr. O'Brien: Well, I've already – I've already been dealing with that to a certain extent, but I will say this. I am vaccinated and I support vaccinations.

However, I also support our members' choice not to get vaccinated, whether it has to do with a religious belief, and/or an autoimmune disease, or whatever else there is. I firmly believe, and I know, that mandating our members to where – to have vaccines is subject to bargaining.

And the struggle that I have, and I will hold employers accountable with this, it just won't be talk, our members, for the past 18 months, without a vaccination, worked in the toughest conditions ever, where they were delivering packages, working in hospitals, providing goods and services, making certain that food and essential needs were provided with no input from the employers, no regard for our members' health and safety.

Now, all of a sudden, because there's a vaccination, these employers want to be righteous. I don't agree with mandating any of our employees or subjecting the threat of our employees being harmed, whether it's through termination or a financial hardship, as a result of not being vaccinated.

If people don't want to be vaccinated, wear a mask. Let the employers pay for testing. But I firmly believe these employers need to be held accountable.

We've done it in the motion picture industry where I told recently a movie production company that if they wanted our members vaccinated, they were going to have to pay for it and they would have to pay our members that were vaccinated.

So there's always a way to approach this situation and we've done it.

Ms. Rainey: Mr. Vairma.

Mr. Vairma: Yeah I don't know that paying people to take a vaccination is going to be the solution. I, too, am also vaccinated. I believe we lead by example. And with the President's decision on making vaccinations mandatory doesn't eliminate our obligation as leaders to take on those fights and demand bargaining over what that effect is going to be on our members to protect their jobs.

I'm doing it right now with United Airlines. I'm leading the charge across this country, right now, to take on United Airlines to make sure that they sit down with us and they bargain over some reasonable rules.

Them simply telling folks that you are no longer going to be allowed to work because you're not vaccinated. You're going to be placed on this administrative leave, up to 12 months, if you're not vaccinated. That's not acceptable to us.

Sit down. Come to the table. Bargain with us over those effects. And let's come to a reasonable solution to this problem that protects our members' rights.

Ms. Rainey: Time. Any response, Mr. O'Brien?

Mr. O'Brien: I didn't realize Brother Vairma was now running the airline division. He stated at the last debate that he was going to file, get a temporary or file for a temporary restraining order against United Airlines.

And then six days after the debate, he sends out this letter claiming that he is fighting hard to hold United Airlines accountable. But the funny thing is he did not send it to two members of my slate who represent the largest contingency of United Airlines. That's playing politics with a bad situation.

Ms. Rainey: Your response?

Mr. Vairma: No. It's not playing politics. It's taking the lead and getting people to sign on. I'm not the one who had a...is spreading a letter around for signature. But the bottom line is, we are taking on that fight. We're going to continue to take on that fight. We continue to take on that fight today.

And if your members want to join on and they want to sign on, nothing's stopping them. Come on and join our team.

Ms. Rainey: Caroline, your question.

Ms. O'Donovan: I want to bring up another issue that's come up a lot in the campaign, which is the UPS contract. Obviously, there's been a lot of frustration, both over how the deal got signed and what is actually in the contract.

And, I'd love to hear you both talk about what you think the weaknesses of what's actually in the contract are. What you can do or what you would do as President to get some of that ... those rights back for the membership. But also, what you think the impact of the entire situation has been on your ability to organize new members.

Ms. Rainey: That question's for Mr. Vairma.

Mr. Vairma: I think that it's what's really important with the UPS contract, and now that the 2/3 rule has been eliminated, is to make sure that our members understand all of the issues, to make sure that we are transparent, that our members are educated, and we engage them in the fight.

You know, the UPS contract was rejected by 25 percent of the members. Less than 50 percent of the members voted on that contract. We have to change that. We have to change that dialog. That's unacceptable.

If we have less than 50 percent, the employer isn't going to listen to what our demands are. We need to make sure that we hear what the members are saying. We need to make sure that we deal with the tough issues at UPS.

But we also need to recognize that all we hear about is United Parcel Service. It's 325,000 members. There's another million members out here in this International Union that want their voices heard, that want to know that they are going to be protected, that we are going to listen to them, that we're going to address their needs and their concerns going forward.

So yes. We will deal with UPS. We will make sure we get our members engaged. We will deal with their issues, but let's do it with everybody else in this union.

Ms. Rainey: Mr. O'Brien, your response?

Mr. O'Brien: Yes, I mean the UPS agreement is the largest collective bargaining agreement in any union. I, too, myself. I represent about 220 white paper agreements in my local union. The United Parcel Service contract is very important. I did not support the last agreement because there were concessions.

There were 22.4s. There were PVDs, which I believe originated out of Steve's local as a trial period where they allowed people to deliver packages out of their personal vehicles.

We need to stop giving stuff to companies that have record profits. We need to stop giving concessions to companies, no matter how big or how small they are.

And yes, United Parcel Service, we have another million members out there in the agreement, but everybody watches what happens at United Parcel Service. And they act accordingly.

Ms. Rainey: Do you have any follow-up?

Mr. Vairma: Yeah. Again, playing politics with a collective bargaining agreement is inexcusable in any form, whether it's UPS or whether it's in the white paper industry. And that's

exactly what happened in this last negotiations with UPS, as we lead a Vote No campaign before we even exchanged a single proposal.

Why is that important? If you're playing politics, if you keep demonizing our largest contract in this union, it affects organizing. You're sitting out there trying to convince people at an Amazon or convince people in other organizations to join our organization, when all they see in writing is how bad this contract is.

Ms. Rainey: Time. Time. Sarah, your question?

Ms. Jones: Yes. We have a question from the audience for Mr. O'Brien. General President Hoffa has endorsed your opponent. Why do you think that is, and what does it tell members about you and your opponent?

Mr. O'Brien: Well, I think it's clear that, you know, we've established this, that Steve was the third choice from President Hoffa. And I don't know why President Hoffa endorsed him. I would assume because, it's like everything else, path of least resistance. You know, I've been clear in my messaging, moving forward, we're going to be a more dynamic, militant organization. We're going to take on the fights.

And, I always tell people, if you're happy with the lack of organizing, you're happy with getting the lack of first-time contracts, and you're lack – you're you're happy with lack of leadership, then, you know, General President Hoffa's administration, and Steve, and his team are one and the same.

So, you know, the reality of it is, I can't speak for General President Hoffa. I haven't seen him in years other than yesterday for the first time, but I would assume that, you know, he wants to carry on his legacy. And this is a Union that can't be run remotely. This is a Union that has to be hands-on. And this is a Union that requires hands-on leadership.

It can't be run from a remote control in a log cabin in Michigan or a log cabin in Colorado. It has to have hands-on leadership. It has to have a leader that is not looking for a retirement job. It has to have a leader that has given up his entire adult life for the Teamsters Union and will continue to do that, and that leader is me.

Mr. Vairma: Yeah, let's not forget the fact that I started my career in 1978. I've been in this union for almost 45 years, and I was a rank-and-file member for the first four years of my career, working as a warehouseman, you know, stacking boxes in the back of trucks and working as a forklift operator.

You know, to say that I'm going to work and be engaged remotely or in some kind of retirement job is ridiculous. I have a proven track record. I've worked as a Warehouse Division Director for the past nine years. I've taken on fights. I've lent my support to local unions across this country to help protect those local unions.

We led the charge with Sysco and US Foods. I assisted you in your backyard with Local 653 in the Sysco organizing campaign when it wasn't going to be politically correct. And you know that's true. When people were telling me not to lend support, I did bring support to your area.

Ms. Rainey: Time. Your response, sir.

Mr. O'Brien: That is not true. You actually tried to get your organizers, which we have one in the room, to take that campaign away, saying we didn't have enough support. Jack Curran came to Plymouth, hid in his hotel room because he didn't want to tell me that they can't give O'Brien another victory.

So let's put facts out there. And if you are so influential with Sysco and US Foods, how come we don't have any neutrality agreements around the country? Everybody that takes on Sysco or US Foods is on their own. And you and I had one conversation about Sysco towards the end, when we got the deal done.

Ms. Rainey: Time.

Mr. O'Brien: So let's have facts on the table.

Mr. Vairma: Let's do tell ... No. Let's tell the truth. You have a good individual that's working for your campaign, Chris Rosell. You forget that Chris Rosell was in your backyard up in Massachusetts? That he was engaged in organizing up there with Sysco? That he was actually assisting Local 653 to bring that home? That he was working from my Division, in support of my Division? Did you forget about that?

Yes, he's working for your campaign, but he was sent up there by me to help you out up in Boston. So don't say that I'm not trying to help you out or that I've never helped you out. That's just a fabrication. You know it.

Ms. Rainey: Time. I'll allow for one more response.

Mr. O'Brien: Is that the same Chris Rosell that you allowed to get fired because he wanted to organize the organizers at the IBT?

Mr. Vairma: Yes. Steve didn't let -- No, I did not get him fired.

Mr. O'Brien: No. I said allowed to get fired.

Mr. Vairma: No.

Ms. Rainey: Ok. On to the next question. Mr. Vairma, what specific targets are you looking for in terms of boosting the percentage of workers represented by unions? The number has fallen precipitously in the recent decades. And how much ground can you actually regain, especially among younger generations who may be less familiar with unions?

Mr. Vairma: Ok, well again, setting a actual target, I would hope that we can organize another 10 to 15 percent of membership within the first year, first two years.

I believe the programs that we're going to adopt are going to help that along, help us accomplish those needs by restructuring our divisions, by having our divisions responsible for organizing within their crafts, making sure that we are protecting every single craft and every craft has a voice and accountability in organizing and building their ranks and strength.

That's what we're going to be focusing on. Organizing is extremely important, and we need to change the model. We need to make sure that we have rank-and-file members engaged in every facet, every step of the way in organizing. And I think that is going to bring us success.

But I also think what will bring us success is us taking a look at trying to rejoin the AFL-CIO. And if we could set that tone and have one single voice in labor to be able to take on these corporate giants, I think that's going to help us succeed and help us in organizing. But we will be changing that model, make no mistake of that.

Ms. Rainey: Your response, Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: Yes. I think organizing, I think we agree on, that is the lifeline of the Teamsters Union and any other union out there.

But I think outside of Amazon, which we've talked about, and I think you have our position on it, we have to look at the industries we currently represent, where we have collective bargaining agreements around the country, like the Republics of the world, the Waste Managements of the world, the Syscos, the US Foods of the world, and look to organize from within as well.

You know, often to times, we get oftentimes, we get a contract and we're happy with it, but we should be leveraging our strength at the bargaining table internally to try and get card check neutrality so that everybody that's a Teamster that work in these similar industries has the same contracts.

Regional bargaining, having a product that people will buy into, strong collective bargaining agreements. We have to organize from within.

Ms. Rainey: Time. And a response.

Mr. Vairma: Yeah. I'm glad you brought that up, Sean, because that's what we're talking about when we talk about being reckless. When we're trying to build campaigns and build organizations, how do you do it when you take a Republic and you extend picket lines across this country?

You know, at the last debate, you accused my running mate, Ron Herrera, of doing nothing to assist you in that campaign. He did just opposite. He did assist every step of the way. He did make sure that we had folks out on those picket lines, that we had people honoring those picket lines.

But those were members who sacrificed in order for you to try and succeed...

Ms. Rainey: Time.

Mr. Vairma: ...and you walked away from it.

Mr. O'Brien: Time's up, sir.

Ms. Rainey: Your response.

Mr. O'Brien: Absolutely. That's fiction. You know, Ron Herrera couldn't even get in touch with the head labor guy from Republic. You can ask Chuck Stiles, who was his number two guy. But the reality is, you want to talk about supporting striking workers, you authorized extension of picket lines in Local 120, Sysco, and you authorized Local 41 to go out there. Our brothers and sisters supported that strike line and got sued for \$1.3 million. They sent a letter to you asking for support and, again, true to your character, no response, no support, and you're the head of the Division.

Mr. Vairma: Yeah, that's not accurate. That's another lie. I have not ... I did not leave them hanging out there. And I believe that still hasn't been decided by the general executive board at this point.

But I don't believe that Tom Erickson...I can't believe that Tom Erickson, if he's sitting on your team or sitting in this room, would ever accuse me of leaving them behind or ever, ever accusing them that we didn't do everything in our power to help that situation out.

It's a bad situation that occurred, there were mistakes that were made, and we did what we could to try and protect Local 120 along the way, including...

Ms. Rainey: Time.

Mr. Vairma: ...funding...

Ms. Rainey: Time.

Mr. Vairma: ...the legal suit...

Ms. Rainey: Time.

Mr. Vairma: ...a major portion of their legal suit, spending thousands of IBT dollars.

Ms. Rainey: Do you have any response?

Mr. O'Brien: I know Tom wrote the check and asked for help and you didn't respond.

Mr. Vairma: Tom got a lot of help from us and he knows it.

Ms. Rainey: Ok. The next question comes from Caroline for Mr. O'Brien.

Ms. O'Donovan: Earlier this year, there was a very high profile union election at an Amazon facility in Alabama and the union RWDSU lost.

And there was a lot of conversation around intimidation tactics and that kind of thing, captive audience meetings, and misinformation about dues paying, and a question of why there aren't, you know, higher consequences for that kind of behavior and why we don't have stronger protections for workers.

And I guess I'm wondering, to what extent, at all, you feel like the International has a role in changing the legislative environment there.

Mr. O'Brien: Well I think we have an opportunity right now, especially with the Biden Administration and a Democratic House and Senate. And I think, you know, everybody supports the PRO Act and that's stuff that needs to happen.

But I think more importantly, right now, it was an unfortunate situation in Alabama. And, you know, I will ... we may agree on this, but I think the strategy should have been a little bit different when we ... when they were trying to organize Amazon down there. But we've got one thing going for us right now, and that's the strength of the administration.

We've got a secretary of labor now, who was a card-carrying labor, who was a Mayor of the City of Boston, who actually understands what it is to organize and support organizing drives, who is, you know, hell-bent on retaliation against workers, especially when they're trying to make a choice. A choice for the better.

So, I think we've got to leverage our political power and make some changes. I think we've got to unify as a Union to make our members understand how important it is to vote and support legislations such as the PRO Act, which will make it easier with less retaliation against future members.

Ms. Rainey: Your response.

Mr. Vairma: Yeah, I'm not going to criticize the RWDSU for taking this big step trying to organize it. I think that the strategy should have been different. I think that if we followed the plan that Randy Korgan has set forth there and having a real discipline in there, that may be the better way for us to go.

I certainly embrace that as we're going forward across this country to try and organize Amazon, that it does take a real discipline, a discipline amongst the local unions and a real coordinated effort. You know, but I commend ... I commend the RWDSU for taking a, you know, taking a stand and trying to do something to organize those folks. We've taken on Amazon in my own backyard.

You have to do it. You have to fight it at a city council level before they get into place. And we were able to shut that down in Aurora, Colorado. We took on that first step and that first fight. It is important to pass the PRO Act.

Ms. Rainey: Time.

Mr. Vairma: That's where we're going to grow. That's going to be our survival.

Ms. Rainey: Your response.

Mr. O'Brien: Yes. I mean, I've been fighting that same fight with Amazon for about 18 months myself, but it's not just Amazon that's retaliating against people trying to organize. It seems to be a pandemic around this country, and it was a pandemic under the previous administration.

So, it's not just about organizing Amazon. It's about allowing people to organize free of threats and retaliation in many different industries that we represent.

Ms. Rainey: The next question goes to Mr. Vairma from Sarah.

Ms. Jones: Democrats have characterized the administration of former President Trump as being objectively anti-worker, and, indeed, the administration did weaken OSHA and loosen regulations that kept workers safe.

Knowing that Mr. Trump has some support from within organized labor, how much of a priority would the political education of membership be for you?

Mr. Vairma: Yeah. I don't think that you're just doing an attack on Donald Trump. It's very, very true that Donald Trump did a lot of damage to labor. There's no question about that.

But it is wh ... again, what it comes down to, education, honesty, talking to our membership about what's important, but talking to the membership about the issues and getting ourselves focused to what we are hired and employed to do. And that's to represent our unions representing our members.

And it's important they understand why that's so important, why those kitchen table issues matter, why those collective bargaining agreements matter, and that we can't afford to take that down by being reckless in votes and putting people into position of office that are going to harm us.

I mean it may sound good and I get it. I understand the personal issues that individuals deal with across this country, but it's important to understand what you deal with on the job, every day. You employ us to watch out for your contracts, to protect your contracts, and to ensure that we have the right people in place that are going to do that.

We had to do that with Joe Biden in this last election. It was critical. Our pensions were at stake. We had hundreds of thousands of people that were facing the potential loss of benefits going forward. And we needed to ensure that we had somebody in office that was going to hear us, and was going to carry our water, and listen to our voice.

And we did that. And we did that by staying strong, by going after the Butch Lewis Act, by ensuring that that act was put into place, by taking out bad politicians, like I did in Colorado, that voted...

Ms. Rainey: Time.

Mr. Vairma: ...100 percent of the time against pension reform.

Ms. Rainey: Time. Your response.

Mr. O'Brien: Could you repeat the question?

Ms. Rainey: The question was regarding the support of Donald Trump within rank-and-file union members and whether you think that union members should have, you know, some political education when it comes to their policies.

Mr. O'Brien: There is no doubt that our members need to be educated. And we have to put a program in place, and we're prepared to do that under our administration. You know, oftentimes, people make decisions based upon personal issues, based upon personal beliefs, and based upon what a President says.

But I know the one thing that we have to get better at as an organization is to encourage our members to not only think about their personal issues but to think about how this politician is going to affect my employment, my future employment, how this politician's going to affect my livelihood moving forward.

I know personally, when I make a choice politically, I always look at not what's popular. I look at how is this going to affect putting food on my table, making certain that I have a retirement? And that's the choice, and that's a choice we have to encourage our own members to make.

Ms. Rainey: Time. Any response?

Mr. Vairma: Again, and that is why it's so important. When I talk about pensions and why the pensions are so important and why the Butch Lewis Act was so important, the consequences of that election, of protecting our pensions is something that my opponent was not willing to do.

My opponent decided to send Richard Neal a letter embracing the UPS cuts in benefits, of up to a 20 percent cut in benefits, to try and repair those pensions, while the rest of us took on the fight across the country to change over the Senate, to make sure that we had an opportunity and the ability to pass the Butch Lewis Act.

Ms. Rainey: Time. Any response?

Mr. O'Brien: Yeah. So The Butch Lewis Act, as it was first introduced, and his godfather, Rome Aloise, who is an expert on pensions endorsed the 20 percent cut, as well, because at the time we had a Republican President, Republican House and Senate.

That Butch Lewis Act, as it was originally proposed, would have never passed. And the Butch Lewis Act, as it proposed, which we supported passed. We supported any solution to a problem. And at the time, that was the most viable.

And the actuaries from the IBT even conceded at a meeting that you weren't at that this plan wouldn't work as it's drafted.

Ms. Rainey: Moving on, next question is for Mr. O'Brien, coming from me. So, this question actually was sent to me by my colleague Eleanor Mueller, who is also a labor reporter at Politico.

We know, given the Democrats' razor-thin majority in Congress, lawmakers are only able to enact pieces of the PRO Act via the budget reconciliation process, such as the ability for the NLRB to levy fines.

These small pieces of the PRO Act, is that actually going to be enough to move the needle when it comes to growing union membership? And are these provisions cumulatively really going to come anywhere close to actually altering labor law? And if not, what do you think the Teamsters should focus on when it comes to labor reform if Democrats cannot get the PRO Act done?

Mr. O'Brien: Well, I'll say this, that, you know, every little bit is going to help. We were under four years reign of terror under the NLRB, under the DoL, under the Trump Administration. So whatever we can get accomplished is going to be a work in progress.

I'm not certain what the answer is, but I know this. Again, getting back to making the right choices politically and holding these politicians accountable, whether it's Democrat or Republicans.

Often, too many times, and we've seen it with this Hoffa administration where they ... we give money to politicians who promise us the world and don't deliver. We need to hold these politicians accountable and make them understand that if they ... we are going to support their campaign, they need to support our issues.

And if they're not going to support our campaigns, we have to endorse candidates and support candidates and invest resources in such candidates to ensure that our members' rights are protected. But more importantly, makes it easier to organize, makes it easier to fight for workers' rights.

And it's not just under a collective bargaining agreement. We talked about paternity leave, maternity leave, all kinds of leaves that are now very important in society. We need to make sure these politicians are not only upholding conditions to organize easily, but to ensure that it's good for the worker in general.

Ms. Rainey: Your response?

Mr. Vairma: Again, I agree. I don't believe that the PRO Act's a perfect document, but it absolutely is a step in the right direction. And it is important to make sure that we're engaged politically and hold our individual congressmen accountable.

I've done that. I've done this my whole career. I've taken on the big fights in Colorado. Where we engaged and we took on big coalitions to fight against right to work and paycheck deception, which we beat on ballot initiatives. We were one of the first unions to be successful in beating two major campaigns like that.

It is about holding them accountable. And when they're not going to be accountable, we get them out of office. You know, we work by having these coalitions and working in partnerships with folks, we were able to take a red state and flip it blue. I mean that's something that's a big accomplishment.

And that's what we need to do with our politicians on a federal level. Make them accountable. Hold their feet to the fire. Make sure they understand our concerns.

Ms. Rainey: Time. Your response?

Mr. O'Brien: I mean I think we have a ... a ... we agree on something finally.

Mr. Vairma: Just a little.

Mr. O'Brien: I'll leave it at that.

Ms. Rainey: Ok. The next question is for Mr. Vairma from Caroline.

Ms. O'Donovan: I have a question from rank-and-file member Stephanie McGuinness, who asks why the IBT is opposed to filing national class action grievances to take on UPS when there are national widespread issues such as subcontracting and outsourcing of Teamster feeder work?

But I want to expand on that a little bit, just on the topic of subcontracting and outsourcing to talk about it, as well.

I think the broader trends that we see in the workplace, whether it's the gig economy and you're talking about independently large workforces of, you know, fissured, independently contracted workers or, not to, you know, bring this up again, but Amazon's DSP network, right, is also subcontracted, which presents a specific challenge to organizing those workers because they're not direct employees of Amazon.

So, um, this question is specifically about the national class action grievances question, but also I think...you know ... what would you do to address the larger trend that we're seeing that sort of threatens union membership in the United States?

Mr. Vairma: Ok. That's a multi-faceted questions in there, so let me deal with the first part.

I believe that one of the critical concerns in United Parcel Service in traveling the country right now and listening to the members talk about the frustrations in the grievance process is we need to do a major revamp in the grievance process to expedite that process.

But one of the things when you're talking about national grievances, etc., is you can't set aside our local autonomy, even on our national agreements. One of the things that make the Teamsters so strong is our ability to run our local unions in the way we see fit as local leaders.

You know, we can guide them from the International. We can advise them. We can encourage them to do things, but we can never – we can never step on those locals rights. Local autonomy is sacred to this international union. It's sacred to me, and I'll protect, with everything I have, is the ability of our local unions to remain autonomous.

So you have regions that are set up that have to address issues. You have locals that have to address those local union issues, and then, you have that process that comes up to the nationals. That's how our process works at United Parcel.

Dealing with the gig economy, that's going to be critical in our organizing efforts. Misclassification of workers is unacceptable, period. You know, all these workers that are controlled by these corporations, and even though they're told they lease and own a vehicle of their own choosing and they have all this "freedom" to go out there and do what they want, when they want, how they want isn't true.

It couldn't be further from the truth. Port drivers and the port campaigns. They're not individual contractors. They're not individuals. They can't just pick and choose what they're going to do and when they're going to do it. That's an individual contractor.

Ms. Rainey: Time.

Mr. Vairma: They're told what to do. And we need to fix that misclassification problem.

Ms. Rainey: Your response.

Mr. O'Brien: Yes. So, UPS is easy. I mean, we negotiated a contract in 2018 that gave UPS the right to subcontract existing feeder work with the promise of all these jobs. If you go into any feeder yard right now at a UPS facility, there's more subcontractors than there ever was because there's lack of leadership and enforcement of these agreements.

And I will comment on one thing that my opponent said that I disagree with. You know, the autonomy of the UPS agreement, which is a national agreement that has local supplements.

We shouldn't be putting other areas in harm by allowing companies to test cameras in vehicles without checking with the national. We shouldn't allow personal vehicle deliveries, all which start out of my opponent's local.

And it's known as the Can Do It Local. If UPS wants something and man -- our members say, "Why can they do it?" The response is, "They can do it."

Ms. Rainey: Time. Any response.

Mr. Vairma: And that, again, is not true. We don't have cameras at UPS in our local agreement. We don't have cameras at UPS in Colorado. We've made it very clear to UPS that if you try and put cameras in our trucks, we're going to take you on.

And under the central conferen -- under the central region, we have a right to strike if we get to a deadlock. And we are totally prepared, and they know that we are totally prepared, to do that should they go ahead and push that issue with us. So that's not true. That's a falsehood.

Ms. Rainey: Your response.

Mr. O'Brien: Steve, you already conceded that in your 25-year career, you only struck six times, so UPS knows you're not going to strike. And let's be realistic, you are a testing ground for UPS.

Ms. Rainey: The next question comes from Sarah for Mr. O'Brien.

Ms. Jones: The nature of work is changing. The threat of automation, the rise of the gig economy present many new challenges for the Teamsters. Meanwhile, for a number of historical and structural reasons, there are low rates of union membership in both the private and public sectors.

How will you convince a new generation of workers that the Teamsters are here to help them?

Mr. O'Brien: Well I think, first and foremost, we have to educate this new generation of workers. As we know that, you know, I'm a fourth-generation, there's many second, third-generations in this audience.

And, you know, they didn't grow up with the core values or understand the fights that, you know, our forefathers and foresisters fought for the terms and conditions and protections we enjoy.

So education's going to be paramount, but more importantly, it's embracing this next generation of workers, making certain that we look for opportunities. You know, there's -- technology is going to be another threat, and it has been a threat to us in many different arenas that we're in.

And, if we are not looking, number one, to negotiate strong contracts ... contracts that protect against the dissemination of good middle-class jobs, you know, shame on us. We need to go and negotiate the strongest contracts.

But we know that technology, inevitably, is going to eliminate some jobs. It happened in the grocery warehouse where we have robots picking orders, right?. We also have it in many different areas.

But we have to look for opportunity to capture jobs as a result of technology, whether it's maintaining robots or drones, whether it's being programming these robots or drones. We have to look for that opportunity.

We can't just take the path of least resistance and say, "Well, it's technology. Sorry, you're out of a job." We have to look for opportunity as well. And that will obviously encourage the younger generation as well.

Ms. Rainey: Your response.

Mr. Vairma: And again, this is ... this situation where... this is what we do. You know, we have to evolve with the technology. We have to move forward and we need to make sure that we are bargaining contracts that are going to address those situations and protect our members' jobs.

You know, obviously, a lot of these situations, they want to put these ... these ... this technology into place to replace Teamster jobs. We need to find out what the alternatives are. Where could we place our workers? Make sure our workers are protected at all costs.

We've done that. We did it with the Wetrone systems when they brought them in in grocery, and then we started negotiating over mechanical jobs for individuals. But I'm going to talk about that hit about trying to tell me that I only had six strikes like that's something that's bad.

Mr. O'Brien: Must be bothering you.

Mr. Vairma: That's called fighting smart, Sean. I've had six strikes and I've never lost one. Every single strike, I took on major carriers, Anheuser-Busch...

Ms. Rainey: Time.

Mr. Vairma: ...SuperValu.

Ms. Rainey: Time. Your response.

Mr. O'Brien: Did you take on Kroger when you negotiated 4,000 members out of a Central States Pension Fund and put them in a fund when you colluded with the employer and you put them in a fund that has a less accrual rate today than it did when you took them out?

And you also encouraged ... the people ... employer union trustees to get sued. The one thing about you, you always blame the Union. Blame the employer, Steve, and stop colluding with them. Tell the story. Why didn't you strike Kroger when you took them out of the pension?

Ms. Rainey: Your response.

Mr. O'Brien: I have the documentation right here.

Mr. Vairma: Yeah, again, on the Kroger situation, obviously, Central States was in a perilous position. It looked like Central States was going to fail at that particular point in time. Company came in, decided that that Kroger pension was going to go into place as a last, best, and final offer if necessary.

Our members weren't going to strike on it. They were going to guarantee those members their benefits in a make-whole remedy, if you read the document, that if Central States was depleted, Kroger had to make up the difference in those salaries. I mean difference in those pensions and make sure that our members were made whole in that pension.

Ms. Rainey: Time. One more response.

Mr. O'Brien: Yes. I mean there's no ... the documents don't lie. But I would ... the question that needs to be asked is, you know, he's a guru that fixed all the pensions, so he says. Are they better? Do they have a higher accrual rate in this new pension than they did when they were in Central States?

Ms. Rainey: Moving on. This question's for you, Mr. Vairma. Mr. O'Brien has brought up your comment regarding referring to members of his slate as tokens. I want to give you the opportunity to clarify your comments. And also, I want to ask you directly, do you think that referring to minorities as tokens, or females as tokens, is offensive?

Mr. Vairma: Yes. If it's especially -- depending on its context. I did not say that anybody was tokens. I said, in a reference to my team, in bolstering what my team and the creation of my team, is that they were not tokens, that every single person was placed on my team as strong individuals, people who have excelled in their own rights in this organization.

And for anyone to think that I was putting people in place politically as tokens, were wrong. And the record, and it's very clear, I'm on video. Look at the video. I said what I said.

Ms. Rainey: Your response.

Mr. O'Brien: I heard what I heard. Members of my Slate heard what they heard, members of your Slate heard what they heard, and 1.3 million members heard what you said.

Ms. Rainey: Do you have any response?

Mr. Vairma: Yeah. Not tokens means not tokens.

Ms. Rainey: Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: What does that mean?

Mr. Vairma: It means they're not tokens.

Mr. O'Brien: I don't know. You said it, I didn't.

Ms. Rainey: Ok. Moving on. The next question is going to be from Caroline for Mr. O'Brien.

Ms. O'Donovan: We talked about cameras a little bit in trucks. And I guess I'd like to hear a little bit more about whether you think other forms of surveillance on the job, whether it's sensors in vehicles or quotas, should be more a part of the bargaining process, or would they be?

Is it something that you'd like to see Teamsters engage more within the workplace?

Mr. O'Brien: Yeah, I mean, look, our members, because of technology, are under tremendous amount of scrutiny because of technology, whether it's cameras, or listening devices, or sensors, or telematics, or whatever computer-generated program there is.

We have to negotiate strong contracts to protect our members against severe disciplinary action as a result of this new technology. But more importantly, you can negotiate the strongest language in any contract, but there has to be vigilant enforcement of those contracts.

I don't think anybody in here wants to see any one of our members, especially our rank-and-file members that go to work every single day under tremendous stress and pressure, like they have the last 18 months, have to lose their job as a result of a interpretation off a computer or an interpretation off a video camera.

We need to enforce the current language we have protecting against technology. If a contract doesn't have it, we need to negotiate strong language to make certain that our members are not held to a higher standard than most because of technology.

Ms. Rainey: Your response.

Mr. Vairma: Yeah. And this one is another one where we agree. This is a situation where we do need to take these companies on when they're going to try and put surveillance equipment in there.

And make sure that we're holding and making them accountable for what they're going to be utilizing that stuff for. If it's going to be disciplining, discharging our members, then we need to be able to take that on and we need to insist that we take that on.

Ms. Rainey: Any response?

Mr. O'Brien: I agree.

Ms. Rainey: Moving on. The next question is from Sarah for Mr. Vairma.

Ms. Jones: Yes. The UPS contract was controversial with many members, and I'm curious, do you think that that contract and the controversy surrounding it have any bearing whatsoever on Teamster ambitions to organize Amazon?

Mr. Vairma: Well I think I already answered that question earlier. I think when I said that we have to get the politics out of the UPS contract. And one of the unfortunate things with it being the largest national contract that we have at the International is it does get politicized constantly.

Since the day I started working as a business agent, 1982, it's constantly been involved in political disputes. But to demonize it, to keep telling people that this is a horrible contract, to keep telling them all these bad things – bad things that are going to happen under this UPS agreement...

You're sitting out there trying to organize these workers, and the employer's handing them these materials from Teamsters United or Teamsters for a Democratic Union, it's telling them what a bad, bad contract this national agreement is.

Yeah, it makes it difficult to try and organize those folks and convince them that it's not bad, that this is a good contract. And I think the real testament to that is by how many people you have on your slate that endorsed the UPS contract, and if they didn't endorse it, were co-authors of some of the language that you find so offensive in the UPS contract.

It is not a bad contract. Can it be improved? Yes. Every contract can be improved. That's part of our bargaining process, by engaging our members, listening to their input, getting their ideas, and taking it on at the bargaining table, and involving our members at the bargaining table to handle these issues.

That's important to me. That's important to my team and to a Teamster Power Slate administration.

Ms. Rainey: Time. Time. Your response.

Mr. O'Brien: Well if you're going to continue to blame our current members who we are paid to represent, who weren't satisfied with their agreement that contained concessions, and you're going to hang the lack of organizing over the last 10 years on Amazon, this last agreement, I mean, I've never seen you at a UPS negotiation.

I've been there since 2002, so I'm not certain what you're talking about, but if you look -- and you are correct -- there are people on my slate that supported the agreement, because they actually believed what the IBT and your cohorts were telling them.

And, you know, if you want to really look at it, go look at the video when there was selling the 22.4s when they said our package car drivers would never get forced in on Saturdays, getting forced in all the time, that they will eliminate overtime. They're getting more – they're getting forced more so now than ever.

Ms. Rainey: Time.

Mr. O'Brien: So, you know what, Steve.

Ms. Rainey: Time.

Mr. O'Brien: Do a little fact check on UPS.

Mr. Vairma: Yeah, again, you're going to have to check with Rick Hicks on the 22.4, because he definitely was a part of authoring that 22.4 language. And yes, you do have a lot of people on your team that not just believed it, but sold it, told their members that this was a good contract. And you can try and blame somebody else to say, "Well, we convinced them."

We didn't convince them. They were at the bargaining table for Christ's sake. They participated in the bargaining process. So when they went out there to talk to the rank-and-file, they went out there to tell them the truth. They thought this was a good contract. They sold it as a good contract. So what are we saying now?

Ms. Rainey: Time.

Mr. Vairma: They lied then or they're lying now?

Ms. Rainey: Time.

Mr. Vairma: Which one is it?

Mr. O'Brien: They lied.

Mr. O'Brien: Ask our members. You said you've been at the gates. I talked to every one of our members.

Mr. Vairma: I don't believe they lied.

Mr. O'Brien: I talk to every one of our members all the time when I'm at UPS. The biggest issue is 22.4s. The biggest issue is regular package car drivers getting forced. Watch the video. You know, again, you always want to blame someone else. Take a little ownership. Rick Hicks didn't allow PVDs in his local that ended up in the next contract. You did.

Ms. Rainey: Moving on, the next question is from me for Mr. O'Brien. It's no secret that the Teamsters Union has had its fair share of scandal and corruption.

How do you plan to convince your current members and potential members that the union has reformed itself, especially among younger generations who may have only heard of the Teamsters because of the movie "The Irishman," and especially given the fact that you have faced punishment for yourself regarding your leadership?

Mr. O'Brien: Yes. I definitely have faced punishment and I've owned my punishment. I actually used a bad choice of words, and I owned it, and I got suspended, and I adhered to that suspension. Corruption has no place in this union moving forward. You know, people that make mistakes, and we've been under a consent decree, which we're getting out...or we're out of.

And we need to police our own, so we have to be that more vigilant. And, you know, my opponent will attack me on things that, you know, he thinks that are corrupt, but you know, my opponent's godfather is on the verge of getting banned from the Teamsters, and he voted on a sub-standard punishment at the General Executive Board after Hoffa Administration appointee found him guilty of violating his suspension.

So, you know, he wants to sit here and talk about corruption and make it a big campaign issue on the street. He should actually look in his own, you know, look in the mirror and look in his own soul.

Mr. Vairma: No, I think that it is important. Because under my administration that corruption is not going to be an acceptable course. You know in the last debate, Sean, we talked about it. You know we talked about the "Top Chef" situation. It wasn't just about the suspension that you had.

And again, I'm the only candidate up here today who hasn't been suspended from office. You were suspended. And whether you want to say it's a bad choice of words, sweep it under the carpet now, you know, that's on you. But that's not -- when people are looking at who's going to lead this union going forward, is that acceptable to them? Is it acceptable that we make those types, you know, of bad decisions and to get held accountable for that?

In the Top Chef situation, you didn't answer why. You know, why were you going to take the Fifth? If you hadn't done anything wrong, and I've got the text to show that you damn well knew you were sending people down to an illegal picket line. You knew those members were being sent down to that picket line.

Ms. Rainey: Time. Your response.

Mr. O'Brien: Again, fiction. But let's talk about corruption in your own local.

September 2020, you had a business agent who -- I have the police report right here -- who was charged with sexual harassment, obscene language, where he asked, while he was in the employ of Local 455, where he asked a female supervisor, UPS, after he sent all the grievance out of the room, if he could have sex with her. He touched her leg, asked her if he masturbated -- wanted -- asked her if she masturbated

Ms. Rainey: Time. Your response.

Mr. Vairma: That's not the case. That may have been an allegation that came out there. And later on, there's a resolution on there, rather than go to trial. That's it. But that individual, you know, has denied categorically that anything like that occurred. You know, he has his due process and his due course. You know, we're not going to just say, just because the allegation's there that it actually happened.

Ms. Rainey: I'm going to allow for more time on this. Do you have a response?

Mr. O'Brien: He plead guilty three days after the debate. If you're not guilty, you don't plead guilty.

Mr. Vairma: Well, I guess that's the case with you, right? Because you were guilty.

Mr. O'Brien: I was never charged.

Mr. Vairma: Yeah, you were.

Mr. O'Brien: I was never charged.

Ms. Rainey: Moving on. This next question is from Caroline for Mr. Vairma.

Ms. O'Donovan: Earlier, you said that there's no place for misclassification in the Teamsters Union.

I guess I want to return to the -- since I sort of combined two questions earlier about the gig economy and outsourcing, I want to return to the gig economy question and ask, what is the path forward for the Teamsters in terms of ensuring that gig economy workers, whether they be DoorDash drivers, or Uber drivers, or Lyft drivers, are classified as employees?

What's the strategy? I mean, I come from California where we've had ballot referendums. We've had legislation. Now, we have court decisions. You know, what's the next step?

Mr. Vairma: Well, the next step is making sure that we do get them classified that they are truly employees, because that's what gives us the collective bargaining rights. That's what gives us the ability to organize them under the National Labor Relations Act.

We have to fix that problem, because it's too easy to sit there and say, "Just because I lease you a vehicle, that you're -- that you are self-employed." And we're going to continue to see more that, as is taking place going forward.

I mean at United Parcel Service, I think one of the big fights that we're going to be facing at UPS very shortly is when our CEO at UPS came out publicly and said that she's going to create a third-party operation of PVDs, where she's going to have people doing same-day deliveries, and intentionally try and eliminate the Teamsters out of that process.

That's not acceptable to us. That's just, again, another misclassification of workers from a corporate giant, and we need to be prepared to take on that fight. And that's a fight that certainly is going to be coming, without a doubt. You saw it with their newest acquisition.

You know, that, to me, is the segue for them to get ready to go forward at these upcoming negotiations with this third-party operation. And we better be prepared to take that on and take on that fight.

Ms. Rainey: Your response.

Mr. O'Brien: Yeah, so -- Steve is correct. That's another vulnerable threat to us. But, I've been fighting that fight since 2007.

My local, Local 25, we organize FedEx Home Delivery, who is an independent contractor model who leased vehicles, who had to adhere to policies and procedures. We won that case at Region 01 in Boston. It was appealed to three administrative law judges in DC. And the NLRB Region 01 argued in conjunction with our legal counsel, and we lost that case.

And what happened after that is that FedEx started man -- making people buy multiple routes, so they actually were the employers. We need to engage the Attorney General for wage and viol-- hour and wage violations, but we have to change the classification, no doubt.

Ms. Rainey: Your response.

Mr. Vairma: No. Again, and that's what we've been doing this all along, is taking on these challenges and fights. And it is a long, drawn-out battle. We've been fighting in the ports for crying out loud for nine years, trying to get these things changed over. And we're still -- we still have a big fight ahead of us. We have to keep vigilant on it.

Hopefully, with this administration, holding our folks accountable by electing a friendly administration to labor, hopefully, we can get that done. But we have to make that happen. We have to get our members holding their people accountable, their politicians accountable.

Ms. Rainey: Time. The next question is for Mr. O'Brien from Sarah.

Ms. Jones: Yes. Both candidates have occupied leadership positions for a number of years. With that in mind, how would you reassure members who want to know that new leadership really means change for the union?

Mr. O'Brien: Well new leadership's definitely going to mean change for the union. I know I've sat on the executive board for the last 9 years, almost 10 years by the end of my term. And there is no inclusion. There is no transparency.

And I know under my administration that there is going to be inclusion. There is going to be transparency. As a result of coming out of the convention, you know, rank-and-file members will be sitting on bargaining committees, which is huge, moving forward.

But the big thing is we are not going to, and I've done this in my campaign -- you know, I said to you earlier, the power of collaboration to effectuate change -- I'm not going to shun anybody that has the best interests of our rank-and-file members regardless of whether they belong to TDU, regardless of whether they belong to Teamsters United, or they just belong to the Teamsters.

Everybody's going to have a seat at the table. Everybody's going to be free of threats and retaliation to provide ideas, provide solutions. And then we'll collaborate to make the necessary change. My opponent, obviously you heard he mentioned those two groups. And I don't think he's willing to do that, but that's one thing our administration will do. We will effectuate change with the power of collaboration.

Ms. Jones: Your response?

Mr. Vairma: Yeah, again, that's not true, Sean. You know doggone well that as -- my tenure as a Warehouse Division Director, I have constantly assisted local unions across this country regardless of political affiliation.

Unlike you who bankrolled two elections down with Teamsters Local 512 in Jacksonville, Florida to assist trying to get that administration thrown out of office because they simply wouldn't agree to support you. And that's a fact. So when we talk about these things, everybody has to be included, not just certain groups and those that agree with your course of action.

Ms. Jones: Any response?

Mr. O'Brien: So if you win, are you going to include me?

Mr. Vairma: Yes.

Mr. O'Brien: Oh. Thank you.

Ms. Rainey: This is our last question for Mr. Vairma. During the last debate, both of you were very clear that you strongly oppose any transition to autonomous trucks. But with the risks that come along with these kinds of technologies, it seems very clear that there will need to be drivers involved as this evolves.

Automation would make drivers safer as long as there are still drivers behind the wheel. And, you know, the truck lobby has argued that the technological sophistication of automated trucks is enticing to younger people who are considering trucking as a career. So what protections would you seek for truckers in any autonomous vehicle bill, and what could you get them to throw their support behind such a bill?

Mr. Vairma: First of all, you know, I am vehemently opposed to autonomous trucks. I don't believe that there's any place on the highway, any place on our roadways for these autonomous vehicles, and I .

Ms. Rainey: Even with a Teamster behind the wheel?

Mr. Vairma: Huh?

Ms. Rainey: Even with a Teamster behind the wheel of an autonomous truck?

Mr. Vairma: Riding sidesaddle or something? No, I'm not going to agree either way with autonomous trucks. I think it's a bad course for us, and I'm very, very opposed to doing anything like that. We've already had some trial runs done. Right? They've done them where they've had a person behind the wheel. They're doing it, you know, remotely.

They have the boxes behind the trucks that aren't physically hooked up to the vehicles and just have the sensors, and they're supposedly going to stop. I come out of Colorado. We all know that the weather can change at the drop of a dime, and you have to face those elements, the ice, the snow, etc.

I am just -- there's nothing right now that I would be willing to look at that says that it's OK to go forward with those autonomous vehicles. We have to protect not just our members, but we have to check -- have to protect the general public as well.

Mr. O'Brien: Yeah.

Ms. Rainey: Your response?

Mr. O'Brien: Yeah. The general public, regardless of autonomous vehicles, is at risk. And I don't think any of us in organized labor, whether you're pro-Steve Vairma or pro-Sean O'Brien, would ever endorse something that could potentially kill a family of four because of technology.

The reality of it, we have to leverage our political power state by state to ensure that, you know, we fight hard against, number one, autonomous vehicles because it's a public safety risk, but also to protect good Teamster jobs.

You know the other thing too is people don't realize the damage that will do to the infrastructure of this country on roads and bridges. So we have to, you know, join forces and fight against any type of autonomous commercial vehicles.

Ms. Rainey: Do you have any response?

Mr. Vairma: No, I -- this time, we absolutely agree. We're on the same path on this one. This is too vital and too important to us. We can't allow the public to be put at risk. And we need to build those coalitions. I have a history of doing just that, and that's what I intend to bring forward at the International.

Ms. Rainey: I'm happy we can wrap on a positive note. That completes the question-and-answer portion of the debate. Each candidate will now have two minutes for closing remarks. Again, Mr. Vairma will deliver the first closing statement.

Mr. Vairma: Ok. Well again, you have a choice to make. And there's only 64 days left in this election. And I implore everybody to get out there and bring out the vote regardless of who you choose. I hope it's us. I think we have the ability to run this Union, that we are the best choice for our membership, the best choice to lead this Union going forward, to transform it, to move it into a new era and a new direction.

But we've got to get the people out to vote. You know, having less than 14 percent, 20 percent of members turning out in any kind of an election isn't acceptable. It is important for people to get engaged and involved. And all of us, collaboratively, have to work together to build out a vote this time, turn our people out.

Use the GOTV. Use those networks. Talk to those rank-and-file members. Build teams of stewards and activists in every single location to get our members to understand what's at stake and how important this election truly is. It is a historic moment for the Teamsters movement, and we need to capitalize on that.

Again, we have an opportunity to elect, by the way, for the first time in 120 years, we have the opportunity to elect to the second-highest position in this International Union a person of color, my running mate Ron Herrera, not to mention the rest of our team. We have a fantastic team that's out there. They, again, are accomplished individuals in their own rights.

They will represent our members, they will treat our membership fairly, and they will lead this Union into a new direction. We are truly a team. It is a team that is running to run this International Union, not just me, not just Ron Herrera, but our entire team, to build this Union and push us into a new direction.

I appreciate you. I'm asking for your support. I ask for your vote. But most importantly, is don't take that vote for granted. Let's get our members out, and let's get them to vote in this election.

Ms. Rainey: Mr. O'Brien?

Mr. O'Brien: Yes, there is definitely two choices here, and I think that the Teamsters United, O'Brien/Zuckerman 2021 is the only slate of choice. We, too, are proven leadership. We, too, are diverse. But the one thing we have done that our opponents haven't done and are not willing to do is to reach across the aisle and embrace people that don't agree with them.

We need to find a solution to the problems that are out there. We need to organize new members. We need to protect, preserve, and improve working conditions moving forward. And the OZ team is up for that fight.

We also need to ensure that there's a next generation of Teamsters, that we educate and cultivate that next generation, that we make certain that we instill the core values. that generational knowledge will be leaving the Teamsters Union, and we need to embrace these new workers.

[off-mic sound]

Mr. O'Brien: That's a \$500 fine. I'm only kidding.

But the reality of it is, look, change is needed. Change is necessary. And if we don't get our members out to vote, shame on us. 82 percent of our members in the last election did not vote. And what we've been telling people, and I've been told my entire Teamster life and my entire adult life, that if we don't vote, we can't complain.

And the other important factor about turning the vote out, and I think my opponent would agree with me on this...The employers all watch how we vote. The employers watch to see if there's a small turnout, and the employers attack us. They don't think we're united.

So I think it's up to both slates and both candidates up here to encourage a vote and identify that common enemy at the end of this process. And that common enemy is not Steve Vairma, Sean O'Brien, or both slates. That common enemy is the employer and the politicians.

Thank you very much.

Ms. Rainey: Thank you, gentlemen. That concludes the second and last of the 2021 International Brotherhood of Teamsters General President candidate debates. Let's give the two candidates a round of applause.

[applause]

[off-mic conversation]

Ms. Rainey: I want to thank our audience here in Las Vegas for abiding by the rules, and I also want to thank those who have been watching the live stream. I very much also want to thank my colleagues on the panel for being here. And finally, I would also like to thank Richard Mark, the Election Supervisor, for making this lively exercise in union democracy possible.

The recording of this debate and other information on the Teamsters election can be found at www.ibtvote.org.

For those members of the Teamsters Union in both the United States and Canada who are watching, look for your ballot in the mail in early October, and before that, tune in for a debate between the two candidates vying to be General Secretary-Treasurer. That debate will originate from Chicago on September 29th.

And to all Teamsters members, please be sure to fill out your ballot and return it in the mail so that your vote and your voice can be counted.

Thanks again. Have a great evening.

[applause]

[background sounds only]

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