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[00:00:20] **Speaker 1** The following program is a PBS Wisconsin original production report.

[00:00:25] **Speaker 2** 2024 presidential hopefuls drive home their support for the working class amidst an historic strike by the United Auto Workers and Wisconsin workers. Join the front line. I don't know why, y'all. I don't count on. I'm Frederica Freiberg tonight I'm here. And now we hear from voices on the picket line. And an economist looks at this moment through an historical lens. Paul Ryan tells Wisconsin Republicans will lose with Trump, a drain on fresh water resources, has local leaders drafting a Mississippi River compact, and the lock to Flambeau Tribe combats threats to wild rice. It's here and now for September 29th. Funding for Here and Now is provided by the Crocus Fund for Journalism and Friends of PBS Wisconsin. The United Auto Workers union today expanded the nationwide picket line against the country's three largest car manufacturers. It's been two weeks since UAW first walked off the job to strike General Motors, Ford and Chrysler parent company Stellantis. It's been one week since the auto parts makers joined them, including two Wisconsin plants in Milwaukee and Hudson. Marissa Welch has more.

[00:01:54] **Unidentified** Jack Black has no contract or contract.

[00:01:59] **Speaker 3** Nobody's ever done this. A history of the UAW put all three out.

[00:02:02] **Speaker 4** In weekly waves. United Auto Workers are joining the picket line, striking the country's three car manufacturing giants.

[00:02:10] **Speaker 1** Notified my members that morning at approximately 9:00 that get ready to go. And we will be walking in at 11. And that's what we do.

[00:02:19] **Speaker 4** Steve Frisk is the president of UAW local 722 at a GM facility in Hudson. His members, who voted 97% in favor to strike, stand with auto workers across the country with the ultimate goal of renegotiating 146,000 contracts for members. The purpose is simple. Striking for our rights. One major demand is a 36% wage increase and cost of living adjustments.

[00:02:46] **Speaker 1** I actually make less money today than I did when I hired in the General Motors in 1986.

[00:02:53] **Speaker 4** Whenever wages, depressed, wages hit workers hard amidst soaring inflation.

[00:02:59] **Speaker 1** A lot of them have to either work the overtime and a lot of them have second jobs because they just think they can't survive on that.

[00:03:05] **Speaker 3** Amount of money.

[00:03:06] **Speaker 4** Another primary demand is an end to the two tier system.

[00:03:10] **Speaker 1** They could start people at lower wages and they would never actually ever hit full wage like the legacy employees did. It's dividing the workforce and it has caused animosity between workers.

[00:03:23] **Speaker 4** The union says how they got here dates back to 2009, when Ford, Chrysler and General Motors faced bankruptcy. A federal bailout saved them from complete collapse.

[00:03:34] **Speaker 1** What are the conditions of that bailout bill? Was that the union had to reopen the contract and sacrifice a lot of things that we had negotiated, and now that these companies are making. The three of them have made a quarter of $1 trillion in the last ten years. And profits.

[00:03:49] **Speaker 3** It has to come back around. We gave when they were bankrupt, when they were full and going down the tubes we gave. And now it's time to give a little bit of that back. That's all we ask. We produce millions of dollars in profits per month out of here.

[00:04:03] **Speaker 4** Joe New is the president of UAW local 75, which represents workers at a Chrysler facility in Milwaukee, a location now at risk of closure.

[00:04:15] **Speaker 3** Anytime you're on a chopping block, you've got to watch.

[00:04:18] **Speaker 4** A common theme among these union veterans is fighting for the next generation.

[00:04:22] **Speaker 3** Here, I'm fighting for these young people with young families.

[00:04:25] **Speaker 1** And that's what we're doing, you know, bringing these younger kids up to learn how to do these things so that when we're gone, they can take over.

[00:04:33] **Speaker 4** While negotiations have been ongoing, an end doesn't appear to be in sight. As the union expanded strikes Friday to 25,000 people, the UAW strike mirrors the national resurgence for unions across the country.

[00:04:49] **Speaker 1** You're seeing a lot of people organizing now. People are tired of it and they're fighting back. And that's and that's a good thing because we needed that to happen in this country.

[00:04:58] **Speaker 3** If it wasn't for the union, you wouldn't have 40 hour workweek. She wouldn't have paid holidays. You wouldn't have eight hour workdays. The union fights for everybody, whether they know it or not. Because what we do drives the community. It drives, you know.

[00:05:13] **Speaker 4** Reporting for here and now I'm Marissa. Whoa. Check. Don't count on you.

[00:05:18] **Speaker 2** We're gonna go. No pun intended, but what are the driving forces behind the UAW strike and other actions across the country and here in Wisconsin? To take the temperature on organized labor and unionization, where it's been and where it's going. We turn to retired professor of economics at Milwaukee Area Technical College, Michael Rosen. And thanks very much for being here.

[00:05:42] **Speaker 5** I'm delighted to be here.

[00:05:43] **Speaker 2** So of particular interest about you, you worked at the Chrysler plant in Kenosha before it closed. How was the auto workers union different than.

[00:05:56] **Speaker 5** It was. How is it different than. It was a pretty strong union in Kenosha at that time. It was led by, Rudy Kozol, who's, since passed away. But it was a very strong union. In fact, in the late 80s when, Chrysler was when, they were threatening to close that entire plant. Kozol led the union in a fight that actually brought an engine plant to Kenosha and kept many people's jobs. So it was always a strong fighting union. The UAW.

[00:06:31] **Speaker 2** So in this strike, as you know, the UAW wants raises in parity with CEO compensation increases. And the median pay for these auto workers I've read is in the $80,000 range, including benefits. But the GM CEO's compensation package is something like $29 million. This this gap compared to the heyday of auto unions in, say, the 60s or 70s.

[00:07:00] **Speaker 5** But when you think about this is when you think about, in general, the relationship between workers and CEOs. In 1965, CEOs made 15 times as much as their workers. Today, it's over 350 times. The, auto companies have made, a quarter of $1 trillion over the last decade. And yet, the auto workers, have seen a decline in their wages, in real wages, spending power of 20%, 20%. Meanwhile, the CEOs are being paid 20 million a year, getting 20 million a year raises. And this is really the heart of the matter. The people who are creating the wealth for these auto companies have not been adequately compensated. In fact, you may know this, but they that they gave up, they gave up cost to benefit, increases in the Great Recession. They have not gotten those back. And that's one of the issues driving a strike. Another issue that's driving that strike is that, they have a two tier system. Many of the workers are paid significantly less than the more senior workers. And that's not according to the workers themselves. That's simply not fair.

[00:08:22] **Speaker 2** So. So you have said. And you're just saying now that companies, consistently demanded concessions from the frontline workers who were creating, this wealth. But is the tide turning for union labor and taking those kinds of concessions?

[00:08:39] **Speaker 5** I think it is. I think that there are several reasons for that. But one of the most important is, that we have a very strong, economy right now. And when we have a tight economy that is, when unemployment is very low, workers are less fearful, about losing their jobs. And this is that's not the case just recently, that's been the case historically, all the way back to the 1800s. In the 1830s, in the early 1830s, you saw organizing of workers, in the Lowell Mills, mainly, women workers. Young women would come off the farms to work in these mills, when the economy was strong, and they built unions. And then, of course, when the economy got weaker, they were laid off and, unions declined. And that's been a historic pattern.

[00:09:32] **Speaker 2** Just this this question. What about the argument that giving workers the kinds of pay raises that they're talking about, 36% will cost consumers more because production costs will go up?

[00:09:45] **Speaker 5** Well, it's possible that will cost consumers more. But in the 1960s and 70s, up until 1979, wages rose in tandem with productivity as productivity went up. The gains in productivity, that's the output that the workers are producing was shared with the workers. It went in tandem since that time. Since that time, there's been a huge decline. Increases in productivity of 65%. But wages for workers have only gone up 17%. So we know from history. We know from our own history in the 1950s, 60s and even 70s that you could compensate workers adequately, because their productivity was increasing. And that was broken beginning in about 1979 and 80. And ever since then, we've seen a huge, rising inequality. So I think the experience indicates that you can pay adequately pay people now. Will that mean that, CEOs and other executives may be less compensated? Possibly. Will it mean that there's some increase in prices? It could mean. But remember, in the auto industry, the cost of labor is a very small percentage of the cost of production. Less than 6%.

[00:11:11] **Speaker 2** All right. Well, we need to leave it there. There's a lot more to talk about, and we will call on you again. Michael Rosen, thank you very much.

[00:11:19] **Speaker 5** Well, thank you for having me. I enjoyed it, and, I hope we'll talk again soon.

[00:11:23] **Speaker 2** Thank you. If Donald Trump is the nominee, Republicans will lose the election. That's what former Republican House Speaker and Janesville Congressman Paul Ryan said this week, speaking at UW Madison. Here, a now reporter, Stephen Potter, sat down with Ryan and learned more about that opinion, but started his discussion by asking how current congressional leadership can avoid a federal government shutdown.

[00:11:50] **Speaker 6** The problem is, more of our members are new and have never been there for a government shutdown. So I think there are a lot of people pining for this. Not a lot. A few people are pining for a government shutdown. Nothing is gained from it. It doesn't do any good. And I know speaker McCarthy would like to avoid it, but I don't know that he'll have the votes to avoid it. And that's going to be that's going to be a real problem.

[00:12:10] **Speaker 1** What steps should elected leaders take.

[00:12:12] **Speaker 6** To.

[00:12:12] **Speaker 5** Make sure the.

[00:12:12] **Speaker 6** American economy is.

[00:12:13] **Speaker 1** The strongest and safest it.

[00:12:15] **Speaker 6** Can be? You don't want to do anything to feed more inflation. I think you want to make sure that we don't stifle innovation with with overregulation from government agencies. And I think tax policy, you have a lot of the tax code, particularly on small businesses that are expiring in 2025. If we could give businesses certainty that their taxes aren't going to go up dramatically, that would help a lot of long term planning over the long term. We've got to get our debt under control, and that means we have to deal with the the majority of government funding that is not in these annual appropriation bills. Those are our entitlement programs. Our social contract is very important. It provides us a safety net for the poor health, retirement security for most Americans. But it was written in the 20th century in ways that are proving unsustainable in the 21st century. So we need comprehensive reforms of these programs so that they can continue and that they don't bankrupt our country.

[00:13:07] **Speaker 4** What do you think the chances are that.

[00:13:08] **Speaker 1** Republicans.

[00:13:09] **Speaker 6** Will take back the white House? Yeah, well, if we beat Trump in the primary, we'll win. If we nominate Trump, I think we'll lose. I think it's just that simple.

[00:13:18] **Speaker 3** At one point, you did support Donald Trump.

[00:13:20] **Speaker 6** What? Well, when I was speaker of the House, I governed with them. There are two reasons I don't support Trump. One practical, one sort of principled. The practical reason is, ever since his one win in 2016, we've been losing ever since. If you look at, the key swing states in America that will determine the presidency, Wisconsin being one of them, it's the suburban voter that is the swing voter in those states Wisconsin, Georgia, Nevada, Arizona, maybe Pennsylvania. Suburban voters in those states are the swing voters. You think the college educated suburban voter say, in the wild counties in Wisconsin, like Donald Trump, more since January 6th than they did before? So I don't see any scenario where those swing voters are going to be more likely to vote for Donald Trump. The principal reason why I don't think, he should be our nominee is I don't think he's fit to be president. I just don't think the man I think he proved it to all of us on January 6th. But I just don't think the man is fit for the office. A new poll from the Pew Research Center found that about.

[00:14:20] **Speaker 1** 65% of Americans feel.

[00:14:22] **Speaker 6** Exhausted when they're thinking about politics. 55% of them.

[00:14:26] **Speaker 4** Are angry when they think about politics. What needs to be done.

[00:14:29] **Speaker 6** To keep Americans engaged in politics.

[00:14:32] **Speaker 4** And elections?

[00:14:34] **Speaker 6** The question is, can we have politicians that can supply a better version of ourselves, a better version of politics that is also politically viable? That's what I'm praying and hoping for. So can we have politicians that can that can campaign on actually solving problems, bringing us together in fashioning sort of inspirational inclusion, political agenda that actually solves problems, do it from the right perspective. Do it from the less perspective, but debate about ideas and solving problems. I would like to think the country is getting fatigued from this hyper partizanship and polarization, and that they would reward political aspiring leaders who offer that kind of politics.

[00:15:18] **Speaker 2** In Wisconsin. We are fortunate to be surrounded by huge bodies of water, including the mighty Mississippi. Parched states out west like Arizona, with our own rivers drying up, our eyeing our water to pump their way. Concern over such diversion is prompting action to prevent it. This month, 30 mayors representing ten states voted in favor of forming a Mississippi River compact. Lacrosse. Mayor Mitch Reynolds is among the mayors leading the effort, and he joins us now. Thanks very much for being here.

[00:15:50] **Speaker 1** Well, thank you so much for having me. It's a pleasure.

[00:15:52] **Speaker 2** So what would a Mississippi River compact do?

[00:15:56] **Speaker 1** You know, it's really modeled after the Great Lakes Compact. And it's really meant to protect the Mississippi River as a water resource, just for now and for generations to come. So we have to maintain the Mississippi River is not only something that's beneficial for our communities up and down the Mississippi River, but also for our entire nation. If you think about a number of states that the basin drains, it's 32 states that the basin drains. And there's, you know, 40% of the aged products in the nation. We'll be, we'll go, we'll travel down the Mississippi River. And still, for us to create a compact is really just a sensible way to ensure that the Mississippi River is still used as a significant, water resource and natural habitat resource and navigation resource, you know, economic resource for generations to come.

[00:16:48] **Speaker 2** So I know that the concerns are around diversion to states that sorely need water. But would it really be feasible to pump or divert the water out west?

[00:17:01] **Speaker 1** Yeah, you wouldn't think so. I mean, you would think that it would be just. It just incomprehensible just to take a pipe and run across the United States of America to the southwest and say, here's your water. But we do that for oil. And arguably, water is a more significant resource. And oil is I mean, I would argue that. So I'm not putting a pass to anybody. We have a lot of people that say, well, this will never happen. Well, it may never happen, but it might happen. So why not create a contract to ensure that it doesn't? And not only a contract to ensure that diversion is not an option, but also to make sure that we're we're acting in in unity to protect the resource. And I think that that's something that, again, the entire nation has an interest in.

[00:17:43] **Speaker 2** Absolutely. So it's fashioned as a Great Lakes compact. We know that took years to enact. What's the timeline here?

[00:17:52] **Speaker 1** Well, hopefully sooner. Than, quicker than than years. And I think that because there is that model there with the Great Lakes Compact and of course the Great Lakes Compact is is two nations obviously too. So it's not just it's not just the United States, Canada as well. We have ten states and we need our our state legislatures to champion this and to approve that. We need the federal government to approve it. But I think that we already have a precedent of the Great Lakes Compact. It feels like this is, this is a much more doable proposition. What do you know, again, timeline, exact timeline. I'm not sure, but I think that should be quick.

[00:18:28] **Speaker 2** What do you know about, the legislatures, sense of whether they would support this?

[00:18:35] **Speaker 1** Great question. I guess we're early on in this process. I can't imagine that legislatures in these ten states would say, no, we're not protecting the Mississippi River is the lifeblood of all of these states. It's hard for me to believe that that would not happen. But maybe and that's what our the job of, like the group that I'm in, the Mississippi River Cities and towns initiative. I'm the one of the new national co-chairs of this group. One of the things that we're we're doing and we're trying to, to work towards is make sure that that the state legislatures, our, our, our, our federal representatives understand just how significant important that this is. So if there is hesitation, then we can try to convince them otherwise.

[00:19:15] **Speaker 2** Still, you at this juncture seem really fired up about this.

[00:19:20] **Speaker 1** Oh, yeah. Are you kidding? This is a significant hour. The city of lacrosse. And I mean virtually every city along the Mississippi River. The the the past and the the current, the present and the future. All of it is all of all of it is is is is is basically formed by the river with our relationship to the river, by the Mississippi River. It is it is a significant part of our, our community, who we are, who we're going to be in the future. We need to protect this as a resource. And, you know, for for me and for my children for generations to come. I think it is it is just it is critical for our city, for all the cities that, up and down the Mississippi River from Bemidji to to the mouth. We are. It is. It is profoundly necessary for us to protect this as a as not only a resource for our communities, but as a natural resource as well.

[00:20:14] **Speaker 2** All right. We leave it there. Mayor Reynolds, thanks very much.

[00:20:18] **Speaker 1** Thank you.

[00:20:21] **Speaker 2** Experts say summers in Wisconsin have gotten about two degrees warmer since 1970, which has wreaked havoc on wild rice, an important part of native life. But hotter summers aren't the only reason wild rice is facing challenges here and now. Reporter Nathan Benzine has this story.

[00:20:44] **Speaker 3** Hopefully in my lifetime, you know that I'll come back. You know that my grandchildren, my children will have that.

[00:20:53] **Speaker 4** As the leaves start to change in summer drifts into fall. Native people in northern Wisconsin have one thing on their mind wild rice. But due to climate change and other human causes, wild rice is becoming less abundant.

[00:21:07] **Speaker 3** They used to have close to 75 bodies of water. I used to have wild rice on it. Oh, you got rivers.

[00:21:14] **Speaker 4** Wild rice or mono? Men in Ojibwe grows in shallow streams and lakes across the Great Lakes region. Cinnamon is extremely nutritious, delicious, and fundamental to how native people in this area live.

[00:21:28] **Speaker 3** This is a map from 1911.

[00:21:31] **Speaker 4** Records dating back to 1850 show over 225 acres of wild rice in the Loch du Flambeau area. But today that number is closer to 100. Joe Ravine is the wild race technician for the Lock to Farm Boot prize. He says Menomonie is the reason native people migrated to the region.

[00:21:54] **Speaker 3** So prophecies call us, you know, to, go, you know, water, food goes on a water, which is, well, rice.

[00:22:02] **Speaker 4** One woman that was over 2500 years ago, and native people have been harvesting wild rice ever since. Before racers can knock, roast and thrash the seed. Environmental factors have to be just right year round for the seed to grow. It also needs harsh winters or cold winters with thicker lake ice. Maddie Knife Blade is a PhD student at the University of Minnesota who works with Gervin and the tribe to study wild rice, and why it may be disappearing. She says that winter is when Menominee faces its first challenge. So we are seeing less snow, less lake ice duration and both of those have a negative impact on rice. Wild rice needs a long lasting freeze that turns over nutrients on the lake bed. Recent, shorter winters means that doesn't happen as much after winter. Wild rice needs shallow water to germinate. However, dams, culverts and other interventions over the last two centuries have raised water levels too high for the plant to grow.

[00:23:07] **Speaker 3** I have documents that shows where nine states government flooded hundreds and hundreds of acres of wild rice, while might not even call miles from here.

[00:23:19] **Speaker 4** By August or September, if the rice was able to survive, it's ready to be harvested. That's when people like Greg Viscosity Johnson and his partner Alexandria Salinas head out in a canoe to knock being Ojibwe.

[00:23:33] **Speaker 3** You should probably either use it, eat it, harvest it, or share it.

[00:23:38] **Speaker 7** When it's time to harvest. Everything stops and we go out racing.

[00:23:44] **Speaker 4** This guy, Kenny Johnson is an artist and cultural educator in Lockerbie. Flambeau, who has been racing for most of his life. Salinas is the owner of a doorway design collective and is originally from a tribe in Michigan, where rice beds have all but disappeared on one end of the canoe. He pushes the pair through delicate rice beds with a large pole. Careful not to accidentally destroy any stocks. I mean, no man needs a very particular environment to thrive in. Johnson says that the wake from motorboats can cause a huge problem and destroy acres of rice beds. Unless you're on a lake with no rice like we are. Wakes can be large enough to shake rice off the stock, or churn up lake beds and stop the rice from growing in the first place.

[00:24:33] **Speaker 3** That means less food for me and my family and my tribe.

[00:24:36] **Speaker 7** It's a shame to see things in decline and to see them in decline for such selfish reasons.

[00:24:41] **Speaker 4** And the plant faces dozens of other threats, including invasive species, water pollution and severe storms. Because it's impacted by so many different factors, it can show us what's happening and be a signpost of our environment.

[00:24:56] **Speaker 7** When you mess with the natural way of things, there's always going to be consequences that you can't predict.

[00:25:03] **Speaker 3** It's only going to progressively get worse and worse, you know? And so our children and their grandchildren are going to inherit our mess, our mess that we made here.

[00:25:12] **Speaker 4** Griffin says that for the last few years, he has been working with the Wisconsin DNR and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to secure protections for Minuteman, which would at least insulate it from boats and dams.

[00:25:24] **Speaker 3** You can't sit back and not say nothing, you know, because that's how important, that's how important it is, you know.

[00:25:29] **Speaker 4** Until meaningful climate action or other interventions are put in place. Menominee is likely to continue its decline.

[00:25:36] **Speaker 3** And we have to tell our children, you know, that's not how it should be in the future. You guys deserve better reporting.

[00:25:42] **Speaker 4** For here and now. I'm Nathan Benzine in Loch du Flambeau.

[00:25:48] **Speaker 2** Starting next week on this program, we bring you special reporting on the experience of black people in Wisconsin through the generations.

[00:25:57] **Speaker 4** I'm Nathan Benzine. Join us as PBS Wisconsin News embarks on special coverage. Wisconsin in black and white. A look back and a look ahead at racial justice, a one hour special, and a series of reports starting next week.

[00:26:14] **Speaker 2** The premier of Wisconsin in black and white next Monday at eight, followed by weekly special reports. I'm here and now. For more on this and other issues facing Wisconsin. Visit our website at PBS wisconsin.org and then click on the news tab. That's our program for tonight. I'm Frederica Freiberg. Have a good weekend. Funding for Here and Now is provided by the Focus Fund for Journalism and Friends of PBS Wisconsin.