

Tariffs, President Trump, and union negotiations: American steelworkers push for piece of the profits in new contract

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GRANTE CITY – Steelworkers across the nation have unanimously voted to approve a strike if negotiations between U.S. Steel and its unions deteriorate.

After President Donald Trump's recent 25 percent tariffs placed on steel imports, the future profits of American-made steel are looking bright, and workers at both U.S. Steel and ArcelorMittal, the nation's two largest steel manufacturers, are hoping to see a portion of those profits. Because of that, those numbers are being brought to the negotiating table during current contract negotiations. U.S. Steel has set its projected profits before taxes at a 60 percent increase since 2017.

With that increase, the steel manufacturer has proposed a six-year contract with a beginning raise of four percent in the first year, and three percent in the following two with wages tapering down to one percent in the final three years of the contract. The lowest base wage under this contract would increase to \$71,726 in 2024 from \$63,516 currently.

Contract negotiations began on July 18, said United Steelworkers 1899 Chairperson of the Grievance Committee Tom Ryan said. United Steelworkers 1899 represents Granite City workers at the U.S. Steel facility. He said his union's president is joining other union presidents in Pittsburgh to continue negotiations with U.S. Steel for the duration of this week.

Nine plants across the country operated by U.S. Steel are a part of this negotiation, and workers recently voted unanimously to approve the option to strike at each of the nine plants. When asked how long it could be before a strike was possible, Ryan said it could happen as early as the end of this week if negotiations went terribly, but did not expect that to be the case.

“What it's really about is everyone knows U.S. Steel and the steel industry in general had some problems with cheap imports,” he said. “In 2015, when we negotiated last time, U.S. Steel was in trouble and workers understood that and worked with them. We did not demand, nor did we receive any pay increases. We felt like we made sacrifices to help keep that company on its feet. Now U.S. Steel is lined up to have a significant recovery and we want to have a part of that recovery.”

One of the main concerns for unions working for U.S. Steel is health insurance. Union negotiators in Pittsburgh are working to provide either bigger pay increases or cease workers' current load of paying a portion of the health insurance premiums, which also comes with higher copays.

Though Ryan said a strike could be possible by the end of this week, he was quick to emphasize that is an absolute worst case scenario, which would only occur if U.S. Steel “dug in their heels” and refused to negotiate with the unions.

“An honest attempt to reach an agreement will make it go,” he said. “We're working under the provisions of the old contract, and we're alright with doing that as long as negotiations are working toward an honest attempt. But, if it's more of the same and digging in heels and saying 'take it or leave it,' it could be as early as the end of this week.”