



HOW THE RAILROAD UNIONS FUND THEIR POLITICAL AGENDAS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In an ongoing effort to shed light on how unions allocate their members' dues, the Center for Union Facts analyzed spending data from the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET), the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees (BMWFE), and their affiliated local unions between the years of 2022 and 2024. Both unions—which are affiliated with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT)—were selected because they represent the largest segments of the railroad workforce responsible for operating trains and maintaining track, signals, and related rail infrastructure. Their membership primarily includes locomotive engineers, train crews, and maintenance-of-way employees, including track, bridge, and signal workers.

Using annual financial filings with the Department of Labor (known as Form LM-2), we found that BLET, BMWFE, and their local unions direct a significant share of member dues toward left-leaning political advocacy, typically without the consent of their members. In that time frame alone, the unions spent nearly \$72 million on notable entities. We characterized “notable entities” as payments made by BLET and BMWFE for non-representational activities, including political spending, contributions to advocacy groups, and payments to consulting firms.

Our analysis found that BLET and BMWFE union spending is primarily focused on three key areas: support for member branches and union-affiliated state legislative boards, consulting efforts, and

contributions to Democratic-aligned organizations and advocacy groups. The data shows a significant portion of the rail unions’ budgets is allocated toward funding special interests.

BLET and BMW union spending is overwhelmingly partisan. Between the years 2022 and 2024, the unions sent nearly \$90,000 to Democratic-aligned groups while allocating no funds to bipartisan efforts or GOP-led initiatives and campaigns.

NOTABLE BLET AND BMW SPENDING BY YEAR

	2022	2023	2024
Consultants & Misc.	\$2,608,779	\$4,246,830	\$4,231,373
Separate Union Funds	\$18,457,061	\$19,291,799	\$22,836,681
DNC & Aligned	\$0	\$6,500	\$82,920
Bipartisan Efforts	\$0	\$0	\$0
GOP & Aligned	\$0	\$0	\$0
Special Interests	\$24,780	\$75,570	\$29,500
Civil Rights	\$2,000	\$5,000	\$0
Left-Wing Media	\$0	\$0	\$5,000
Totals	\$21,092,620	\$23,625,699	\$27,185,474

BLET AND BMW SPENDING TOTALS – 2022-2024

Consultants & Misc.: \$11,086,982
Separate Union Funds: \$60,585,541
DNC & Aligned: \$89,420
Bipartisan Efforts: \$0
GOP & Aligned: \$0

Special Interests: \$129,850
Civil Rights: \$7,000
Left-Wing Media: \$5,000

Total: \$71,903,793

NOTABLE RECIPIENTS ON THE LEFT BETWEEN 2022 & 2024 INCLUDE

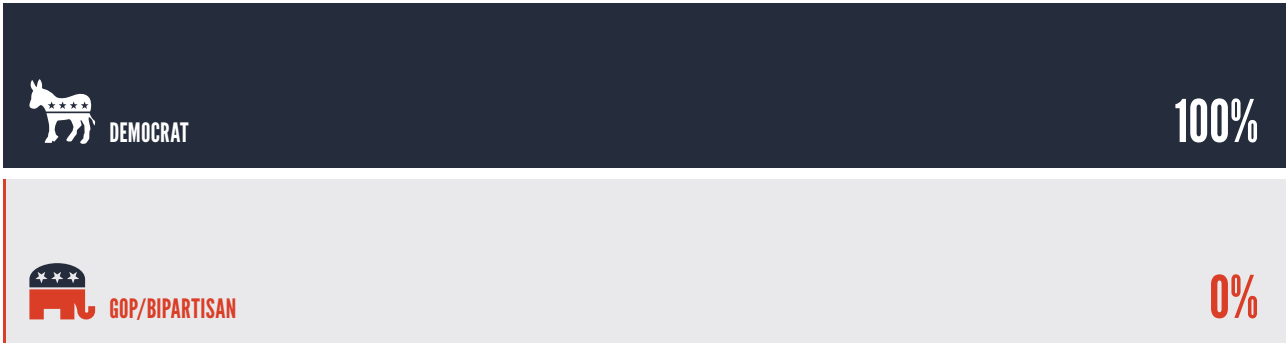
- **\$35,000** | Midwest National Convention Fund
- **\$29,541** | National Democratic Club
- **\$28,000** | RBC & Associates
- **\$27,350** | International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans
- **\$25,000** | Vote NO On 1
- **\$24,879** | Teamsters Rail Conference
- **\$24,500** | The Association for Innovative Passenger Rail Operations
- **\$15,000** | Labor Campaign for Single-Payer Health Care
- **\$10,000** | U.S. High Speed Rail Association
- **\$5,000** | March on Harrisburg
- **\$5,000** | DemList, LLC
- **\$2,000** | Equality State Policy Center

Notable recipients on the left between 2022 and 2024 include a range of Democratic-aligned political organizations like the Midwest National Convention Fund, the Teamsters Rail Conference, and the National Democratic Club. These groups have advanced the causes and electoral priorities of the Democratic Party through fundraising, political organizing, and advocacy activities.

Special interest campaigns aligned with left-of-center policy priorities were also among the most notable recipients. These include Vote NO On 1, a campaign opposing a right-to-work ballot initiative, and the Labor Campaign for Single-Payer Health Care, an organization advocating for a Medicare-for-All system. Other examples include the International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans, whose leaders have ties to prominent unions, the Association for Innovative Passenger Rail Operations, and the U.S. High Speed Rail Association—both of which promote transportation policies frequently supported by Democratic lawmakers and progressive coalitions. RBC & Associates, a boutique firm owned by the president of the Association for Innovative Passenger Rail Operations, also made the list. Notable left-wing media recipients include DemList, LLC, a national political column dedicated to informing the Democratic party and its allies.

POLITICAL ADVOCACY BREAKDOWN BY PARTY

Of the money BLET and BMWF spent on political or issue advocacy between 2022 and 2024 (DNC & Aligned, Bipartisan Efforts, GOP & Aligned, Special Interests, Civil Rights, and Left-Wing Media), all of it went to issues on the left.



METHODOLOGY

This data is based on annual financial reports filed with the Department of Labor (Form LM-2). The Center for Union Facts analyzed all payments made by all national and local BLET and BMWWE union chapters to an entity (otherwise known as “payees”) for the years 2022, 2023, and 2024.

BLET files its LM-2 reports on a calendar-year basis, while BMWWE reports on a fiscal-year basis running from April 1 through March 31. To ensure a complete and accurate representation of BMWWE's 2024 spending, the analysis includes BMWWE payee data reported in its 2025 filing, which captures expenditures made during the remainder of the 2024 calendar year. As a result of this reporting structure, some BMWWE expenditures reflected in the 2022 filing correspond to spending that occurred in 2021.

These payments are classified by the unions as “Political Activities,” “Representational Activities,” “Contributions, Gifts & Grants,” “Union Administration,” or “General Overhead.” We then sorted each payment entry into one of eight categories: Consultants & Misc., DNC & Aligned, Bipartisan Efforts, GOP & Aligned, Separate Union Funds, Special Interests, Civil Rights, and Left-Wing Media. Certain line items, including overhead costs and other general spending, were excluded from the final analysis.

Once the data points were sorted, totals were calculated for each category to provide a comprehensive picture of how the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen and the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees allocate a large share of the dues dollars they receive from their members.

DEFINITIONS

The Consultants & Misc. section has two components. “Consultants” refers to contracted consultants, lobbyists, public relations firms, communications and marketing corporations, legislative consultants, research firms, and publicity-oriented groups. “Misc.” includes promotional items, communications/messaging software, mail and printing, advertising expenses, election services, newspaper subscriptions, and, more broadly, airfare expenses, hotel expenses, and utility expenses.

The DNC & Aligned section consists of payments made toward registered Democrats, Democrat Party-funded initiatives, Democratic campaigns, and organizations that focus on advancing the interests of the Democratic Party.

The Bipartisan Efforts section consists of individuals, coalitions, or initiatives that are truly non-partisan and neither endorse, nor advance the interests of, a political party.

The GOP & Aligned section consists of payments made toward registered Republicans, Republican Party-funded initiatives, Republican campaigns, and organizations that focus on advancing the interests of the Republican Party.

The Separate Union Funds section consists of parent organizations, local branches, labor federations, joint councils, union-funded political action committees, state legislative boards, and affiliated labor organizations. Politically motivated funds are also included in this section, including strike funds, political education funds, and union organizing drive funds.

The Special Interests section consists of payments made toward ballot measures, initiatives, funds, and coalitions that address unique policy matters over a larger party or union agenda. Some examples include the Labor Campaign for Single-Payer Health Care and Vote NO On 1.

The Civil Rights section consists of payments made toward organizations that have race and identity-related agendas.

The Left-Wing Media section consists of media groups, newspapers, and online outlets that train, support, sponsor, and project the messages of labor unions, activists, progressive policymakers, or Democrat-led initiatives.

Certain overhead payments were not included in the final spending estimate. Some of the more common examples include payments toward rent, cable companies, insurance, office supplies, building maintenance, internet service providers, accountants, lawyers and attorneys, auditors, social outings, and grocery stores.

Non-political charities, funds, research institutions, and nonprofits were also removed from the final estimate. Such examples include Pensacola State College, the James R. Hoffa Memorial Scholarship, and the Teamsters Scholarship Fund.