



POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Workers at massive Ford BlueOval SK plant in Kentucky take another step toward unionization

By **Austin Horn**

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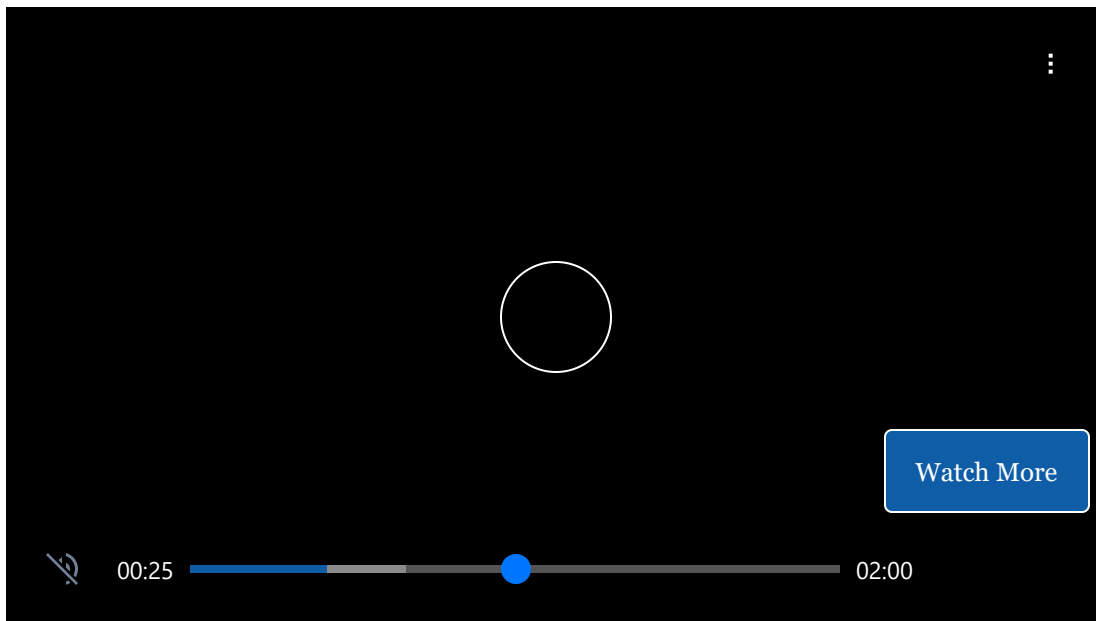


Ford Motor Corp. and SK Innovation announced Monday, Sept. 27, 2021, a \$5.8 billion investment to build two electric battery manufacturing plants near Glendale, Ky. This is a depiction of the so-called BlueOvalSK Battery Park. *Ford Motor Corp.*

Autoworkers at the massive electric vehicle battery manufacturer BlueOval SK in Glendale have filed for an election to unionize one the state's biggest workplaces, the United Autoworkers Union announced Wednesday.

At nearly \$6 billion, the collaborative project between Ford Motor Company and South Korean firm SK On is expected to be the single largest private investment in Kentucky.

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At full capacity, twin battery plants at the BlueOval SK are expected to employ 5,000 people. About 750 workers have been hired thus far.

The step on Wednesday was one of many on the path to potential unionization. In November, workers announced their plans to unionize there through the UAW.

That came as a surprise to some observers given that a deal was hatched initially that workers at the plant would not unionize. But, Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear said in Nov., that applied only to the start of the venture.

Some current workers at the site, which company officials say is on schedule to begin production sometime this year, are especially enthused.

“We’re forming our union so we can have a say in our safety and our working conditions,” Hallee Hadfield, a quality operator at the plant, said. “The chemicals we’re working with can be extremely dangerous. If something goes wrong, a massive explosion can occur. With our union, we can speak up if we see there’s a problem and make sure we’re keeping ourselves and the whole community safe.”

But BlueOval SK itself is irked by the move. They say the action is “premature” given that production hasn’t started and most of the team who will work there has yet to be hired.

“They, too, deserve to have their voices heard. And none of our Team Members have had the opportunity to see how our plant will operate since we have not yet begun production. The UAW is trying to rush BlueOval SK into unionization before our full workforce has the opportunity to make a truly free and informed choice,” BlueOval SK spokesperson Mallory Cooke said in a statement.

The status of the industry is, at this juncture, uncertain. Various incentives and regulations set forth under the current administration of President Joe Biden spurred growth in the electric battery sector even as consumer demand was cooler than expected.

Republican President-Elect Donald Trump is expected to do away with many of those programs, leaving many in the sector in Kentucky uncertain about its future. Still, towns like Glendale are betting that the next administration won’t scuttle their expected growth, according to a recent report in the Wall Street Journal.

Due to a law passed shortly after Republicans took control of the state legislature, Kentucky is a “right to work” state, meaning that employees cannot be forced to join a union or pay union dues.

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