

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CIVIL SERVICE  
& LABOR

----- X

August 1, 2023  
Start: 1:28 p.m.  
Recess: 2:44 p.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Carmen N. De La Rosa  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Erik D. Bottcher  
Tiffany Cabán  
Eric Dinowitz  
Oswald Feliz  
Kamillah Hanks  
Rita C. Joseph  
Francisco P. Moya  
Sandy Nurse

## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Lowell Peterson  
President of Writers Guild of America East

Lisa Takeuchi  
Vice President of Writers Guild of America

Erica Saleh  
WGA

Vincent Alvarez  
President of NYC Central Labor Council

Fran Drescher  
President of SAGAFTRA

Ezra Knight  
Actor / SAGAFTRA member

Rebecca Damon  
SAGAFTRA New York Executive Director for Labor  
Policy and International Affairs

Rao Rampilla  
SAG Member

Bethany Layla Thompson  
SAG Member

Lewis Edward Thompson  
Actor

Rocky Bonifield  
Actor

Jenna Kray  
Actor



2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good afternoon and  
3 welcome to the New York City Council hearing of the  
4 Committee on Civil Service and Labor. At this time,  
5 can everyone please silence your cellphones? If you  
6 wish to testify, please go up to the Sergeant's desk  
7 and fill out a testimony slip. At this time and  
8 going forward, no one is to approach the dais. I  
9 repeat, no one is to approach the dais. Thank you for  
10 your cooperation. Chair, we are ready to begin.

11 [gavel]

12 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Good afternoon.  
13 I'm Council Member Carmen De La Rosa, Chair of the  
14 Civil Service and Labor Committee. Thank you for  
15 joining us today-- for today's hearing and vote on  
16 Resolution supporting the striking members of the  
17 Writers Guild of America, known as the WGA, and the  
18 Screen Actors Guild American Federation of Television  
19 and Radio Artists, known as SAGAFTRA. Today, we will  
20 be hearing public testimony from workers in impacted  
21 by the ongoing labor dispute with the Alliance of  
22 Motion Picture and Television Producers. Following  
23 public testimony, the Committee will hold a vote on a  
24 following resolutions. Pre-considered Resolution  
25 sponsored by Council Member Farías and myself,

1 expressing unwavering support for striking SAGAFTRA  
2 members in their pursuit for a fair and just  
3 contract, and Resolution 694A sponsored by me calling  
4 upon on the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television  
5 Producers to engage in good faith negotiations that  
6 will result in a fair contract for all Writers Guild  
7 of America members. On July 13<sup>th</sup>, after weeks of  
8 talks, SAGAFTRA and the AMPTP reached an impasse and  
9 actors joined writers on the picket line for the  
10 first time in 63 years. There has been a  
11 transformation in the entertainment industry from the  
12 proliferation of streaming platforms to the explosive  
13 use of artificial intelligence. Both actors and  
14 writers are fighting to ensure these developments do  
15 not erode their livelihoods. The actors and writers  
16 have similar demands. Both unions are fighting to  
17 ensure their members can earn living wages by raising  
18 minimum pay rates and increasing residual payment for  
19 streaming service programming. In 2021, SAGAFTRA  
20 actors made a median salary income of \$46,960 which  
21 is far below the median US income \$70,784. This  
22 declining pay is in stark contrast to the overall  
23 industry profits which reported an increase from \$5  
24 billion to \$30 billion between 2000 and 2021. Both  
25

1 SAGAFTRA and WGA also want aggressive guardrails  
2 around the use of artificial intelligence to preserve  
3 their likeness and their writing. However, in  
4 negotiations with SAGAFTRA, the studios have refused  
5 to create guidelines around acceptable uses of  
6 artificial intelligence. We are here today not just  
7 to plead for a fair and just contract to defend the  
8 livelihoods of SAGAFTRA and WGA members, but also to  
9 protect New York City's economy. A prolonged  
10 production shutdown threatens to cost New York City  
11 tens of thousands of jobs this fall. The  
12 entertainment industry employed 101,000 people in New  
13 York City last year. About half of those were jobs  
14 directly in production and would be immediately  
15 impacted by work stoppage. Moreover, the indirect  
16 effects will spread throughout the economy and  
17 transportation and catering businesses that provide  
18 services to studios on location shoots will  
19 experience losses too. The number of film jobs in  
20 the City declined by 2,000 from June to May, and the  
21 number of projects in production in June fell to 184  
22 from 254 in the same month last year. I fear many  
23 more jobs will be lost in the coming months if no  
24 agreement is reached. Fair and just contracts will  
25

2 safeguard the rights of SAGAFTRA and WGA members by  
3 guaranteeing appropriate compensation and a stable  
4 work environment. These members need and deserve a  
5 fair contract. The success of New York City's  
6 entertainment industry depends on it. I'd like to  
7 thank the Committee staff for their hard work in  
8 preparing for this hearing: Policy Analyst Elizabeth  
9 Artz, Rie Ogasawara, as well as my Chief of Staff  
10 James Burke, Legislative Director Kiana Diaz, and  
11 Communications Director Freya Familia. So now we  
12 will turn it over to our counsel who will administer  
13 the oath of-- to the first-- oh, no oath because no  
14 admin. We'll turn it over to our Committee Counsel  
15 who knows what to do next.

16  
17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Hello, we will now  
18 turn to public testimony. We will be limiting public  
19 testimony today to three minutes each. For in-person  
20 panelists, please come up to the table once your name  
21 has been called. For virtual panelists, once your  
22 name is called, a member of our staff will unmute you  
23 and the Sergeant at Arms will set the timer and give  
24 you the go-ahead to begin. Please wait for the  
25 Sergeant to announce that you may begin before

1 delivering your testimony. I will now call the first  
2 panel: Lowell Peterson, Erica Saleh, Lisa Cullen,  
3 Vincent Alvarez. If you would please come up to  
4 testify. Yes.

5 [applause]

6 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Alright, you may  
7 begin when you're ready. Please identify yourself.

8 LOWELL PETERSON: Alright. I was waiting  
9 for the Sergeant at Arms. I'm Lowell Peterson,  
10 Executive Director of Writers guild of America East.  
11 I speak in strong support of Resolution 694A. Thank  
12 you committee members for listening to us at this  
13 hearing, and thank you Chair De La Rosa for  
14 sponsoring this really important resolution. The  
15 Writers Guild of America East represents thousands of  
16 New York City residents who craft stories for  
17 television, for the movies and for streaming services  
18 like Netflix and Amazon. Together, with our sister  
19 union in the West, Writers Guild of America West,  
20 we're trying to negotiate a new contract with the  
21 AMPTP you described. The AMPTP, by the way, does  
22 include in addition to the networks and streamers and  
23 movie studios, big tech companies like Amazon and  
24 Apple. We formulated our bargaining proposals after  
25



1 extensive conversations with our members. This is  
2 truly a bottom up fight. It's a fight about the  
3 fundamental challenges that writers face trying to  
4 sustain middle class careers. I mention streaming  
5 services like Netflix-- listen, they all want to be  
6 streaming services. They've invested billions to  
7 become the new Netflix. The way that the streaming  
8 model works, as you mentioned, has transformed the  
9 way our members' work is commissioned and produced  
10 and distributed and paid, and it has not been good  
11 for middle-class writers. Seasons are shorter.  
12 Period of employment are shorter. Gaps between gigs  
13 are longer. The companies are hiring fewer writers  
14 per show and allowing few opportunities to climb the  
15 career ladder. And residuals that you mentioned have  
16 shrunk. For comedy variety writers who write the  
17 great late night shows we like, things are even more  
18 challenging. There are no provisions in our contract  
19 for those shows when they're made directly for  
20 streaming, and that is the future. The net result is  
21 that it's become increasingly difficult for writers  
22 to build and sustain basic middle-class careers, and  
23 add to this another existential threat you mentioned,  
24 artificial intelligence. Generative AI writes  
25

1 things. We're the Writers Guild. We are very  
2 concerned that without meaningful guardrails that we  
3 negotiate with AMPTP, these generative AI systems  
4 could harm our members creatively and economically.  
5 There is nothing in our proposals that is unrealistic  
6 or impossible. If we want everything we proposed, it  
7 would amount to less than two percent of the  
8 company's profits. It would amount to a tiny slice  
9 of the company's gross revenues. The AMPTP told us  
10 that unless we withdrew our core proposals, the  
11 proposals that address this threat to stable middle-  
12 class careers, they wouldn't move on anything else.  
13 This was on May 1<sup>st</sup>, and here we are fully three  
14 months later, and the companies have not changed  
15 their position one iota. We at the Writers Guild  
16 remain ready, willing, and able to negotiate about  
17 all of the issues that need to be addressed. As you  
18 mentioned the stakes for the City of New York are  
19 high. This-- the film and television industry is a  
20 core driver of the New York City economy. The  
21 Mayor's Office of Media Entertainment estimates  
22 hundreds of thousands of people who work here in the  
23 course of years billions of dollars unique economic  
24 activity and wages. None of this would be possible  
25

1 without writers, or might add, without actors. If  
2 people can't make a living writing scripts, then  
3 scripts won't get written. The company's  
4 intransigence, therefore, is a threat to the whole  
5 industry and therefore, to the City's economy. We at  
6 the Writer's Guild want to get the industry back to  
7 work. Resolution 694A calls on the companies to  
8 negotiate a fair deal, and that's all we want, a fair  
9 deal that addresses the needs that our members have  
10 identified themselves. We are here. We are ready to  
11 negotiate, and we deeply appreciate your support.  
12 Thank you.

13 [applause]

14 LISA TAKEUCHI CULLEN: My name is Lisa  
15 Takeuchi Cullen. I am a TV writer, and I am Vice  
16 President of the Writers Guild of America East.  
17 Today marks three months, or 14 weeks, or 90 days  
18 since the start of our strike. For three months, our  
19 thousands of members have foregone and income to  
20 fight for what we deserve. For 14 weeks our members  
21 have braved the heat and the humidity to walk the  
22 picket line on the streets of this city. For 90  
23 days--  
24

25 [applause]

2 LISA TAKEUCHI CULLEN: Guys, I have three  
3 minutes. For 90 days we've laid awake at night  
4 wondering if we'll ever get our beloved and hard-won  
5 careers back, if we will ever again get a paycheck  
6 for writing. And for all that time, the studios have  
7 not called us. For all that time, they have not once  
8 picked up the phone to invite us back to the  
9 bargaining table. Instead, they scold us. Bob Iger,  
10 CEO of Disney, said we were being unreasonable, that  
11 we didn't understand the business. They  
12 underestimate us. David Zasloff, CEO of Warner  
13 Brothers Discovery, said that writers would return to  
14 our jobs out of a love of work. They threaten us.  
15 One studio executive told a trade publication that  
16 the endgame was to keep us on strike until we lost  
17 our homes. Once we were homeless, then we'd return  
18 and take whatever contract they offered, and that's  
19 where they are wrong. I talk to hundreds of our  
20 members. I see them out on the picket line every day  
21 in the sun, in the rain, in the humidity, and our  
22 resolve has never been stronger, but we could use  
23 your help. Hollywood loves New York. They love to  
24 set their TV shows and their movies here, creating  
25 hundreds of thousands of jobs from electricians to

2 camera operators to the guy who makes the tuna  
3 sandwiches for crafty [sic]. Resolutions like this,  
4 send a strong message.

5 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Okay. So, we  
6 have rules in the Chamber. We don't clap in the  
7 Chamber. We do this in solidarity with our hearing  
8 impaired neighbors, and if you don't agree with  
9 something or don't like it, you can do this. That's  
10 good. Thank you.

11 LISA TAKEUCHI CULLEN: Resolutions like  
12 this one send a strong message to studios that this  
13 city is on the side of the worker, and you, our  
14 elected leaders, demand that the big tech companies  
15 and Hollywood studios come back to the table and give  
16 us the contract we need and deserve. Thank you.

17 ERICA SALEH: Thank you to Council  
18 Member De La Rosa and to this committee for having us  
19 here today and for putting forward this Resolution.  
20 My name is Erica Saleh. I'm a television writer. I'm  
21 member of the Council-- I serve on the Council for  
22 the WGA East. I'm a member of our Negotiating  
23 Committee, and I'm a proud New Yorkers. I came to  
24 New York to be a playwright, but very quickly I  
25 realized that it was impossible to make a living only

1 writing for the theater. So like so many playwrights  
2 before me, I turned to TV. And at the time I saw it  
3 as a way to do what I love, write drama, and to make  
4 a good enough living to live in the city that I love,  
5 New York, and it was. I joined this union that  
6 ensures me a livable wage and provides my healthcare  
7 and a pension, but that was 10 years ago, and over  
8 the past 10 years as the move to streaming has  
9 upended the way that television is written and  
10 produced and distributed, I've watched it get harder  
11 and harder for members of our union to sustain their  
12 careers, let alone a middle-class life. Because  
13 despite record profits, the studios continue to find  
14 more and more ways to pay us less and less. They  
15 squeeze countless free drafts out of screen writers.  
16 They refuse minimum pay guarantees for our comedy and  
17 variety writers working in streaming, and they hire  
18 fewer TV writers for a fraction of the weeks that  
19 they used to. In short, we're being asked to do the  
20 same work that we have always done, but we're being  
21 forced to do it in less time for less money and with  
22 fewer of our fellow writers working alongside us.  
23 It's a familiar labor story, right? Large companies  
24 want to squeeze as much work as they can out of the  
25

1 smallest number of employees they can get away with,  
2 but that's what unions are for. We will not and we  
3 cannot let them do it. So this year, we went into  
4 our negotiations with the AMPTP armed with proposals to  
5 fix this, ways to guarantee our writers the same  
6 stability that they've enjoyed for decades before the  
7 move to streaming, and ways to protect the existence  
8 of our jobs in the face of changing technology. But  
9 the company showed us that they were not interested  
10 in protecting their workforce. They flat out  
11 rejected our demand for a minimum staff size in  
12 television writer's rooms, and they refused to engage  
13 in any conversations about protections against AI,  
14 and in those refusals they showed us their hand.  
15 They want to turn the career of writing into just  
16 another gig. They don't care if the product suffers,  
17 or if it costs people their livelihoods, if it saves  
18 them money, they'll do it. And that's why 11,500  
19 members of the Writers Guild of America's East and  
20 West have been on strike for the past 90 days. As  
21 Lisa mentioned, David Zasloff said that a love of  
22 work would bring us back, but he's wrong. A love of  
23 work is what's keeping us out on the picket lines,  
24 because we do love our work and we want to be able to  
25

2 keep doing it. We're not just fighting for better  
3 wages. We are fighting for better wages, but we're  
4 also fighting for the very survival of our industry.  
5 We're fighting for our members' careers to continue  
6 to exist, to not be down-sized into one or two over-  
7 worked writers or struck trying to humanize some AI  
8 plagiarized script that the studios want to call art.  
9 We know we'll win this fight, but we also now that  
10 the longer the studios refuse to take our very  
11 reasonable demands seriously, the more our members  
12 suffer, as do the hundreds of thousands of other  
13 workers in our industry, as does this city's economy,  
14 all while the studios continue to brag to their  
15 shareholders about record profits. We all need the  
16 studios to come back to the table, and we thank you  
17 for urging them to do so.

18 VINCENT ALVAREZ: Good afternoon Chair De  
19 La Rosa and members of the Council's Committee on  
20 Civil Service and Labor. My name is Vincent Alvarez,  
21 and I'm President of the New York City Central Labor  
22 Council, AFLCIO, the nation's largest regional labor  
23 federation representing more than one million workers  
24 from every sector of the New York City economy. I'm  
25 here to testify in support of the striking union



1 members of the WGA and SAGAFTRA. As you know,  
2 approximately 170,000 members of the WGA and SAGAFTRA  
3 are on strike because the Alliance of Motion Picture  
4 and Television Producers has refused to negotiate in  
5 good faith and meet their demands. The AMPTP's  
6 refusal to negotiate a fair deal on key proposals  
7 including wages, residuals and the use of artificial  
8 intelligence is particularly egregious when it has  
9 continued to amass close to \$30 billion in profits  
10 every year since 2017. Currently, 87 percent of  
11 SAGAFTRA members make less than approximately \$26,000  
12 a year they need to qualify for health insurance.  
13 For Writers Guild of America members, close to half  
14 of their members are being paid the minimum rate, and  
15 writer pay has decreased by 23 percent over the last  
16 10 years when inflation is factored in. Thus, many  
17 members from both unions are not making a living wage  
18 despite the enormous profits that the AMPTP is  
19 generating. While streaming has continued to  
20 increase in popularity, it has unfortunately led to a  
21 drastic decrease in pay for both actors and writers.  
22 Traditionally, if a show is syndicated or sold  
23 overseas, workers and actors were paid-- are paid  
24 well allowing them to financially-- to be financially  
25

1 stable. However, streaming had disrupted that  
2 compensation structure resulting in actors and  
3 writers now being paid significantly less each time  
4 an episode of the show or movie is viewed on a  
5 streaming service. This has not only caused  
6 financial instability for both writers and actors,  
7 but has also devalued their work. Rapid  
8 technological advancements and generative artificial  
9 intelligence and AI tools such as ChatGPT that they  
10 are existential threats to writers and actors.  
11 Writers have expressed credible concerns that  
12 producers will use AI to write scripts or complete  
13 screen plays. Actors have also highlighted concerns  
14 that AI would permit producers to use their likeness  
15 in perpetuity, avoiding the use of real live actors.  
16 The WGA and SAGAFTRA have made reasonable  
17 recommendations to the AMPTP regarding consent,  
18 compensation and protections related to the use of AI  
19 which have been rejected. We believe that demands  
20 put forward by both unions are not only reasonable  
21 but achievable. We all know that writers and actors  
22 are overwhelmingly responsible for many of the shows  
23 and movies we love. The AMPTP cannot continue to  
24 ignore the needs of workers just to appease its  
25

1  
2 shareholders. Workers have a right to equitable pay  
3 and safeguards from unregulated rapid technological  
4 advancements that threaten their livelihoods. I  
5 would just like to close by stating that the New York  
6 City Central Labor Council, AFLCIO, and our 275  
7 affiliates representing 1.3 million workers in this  
8 city welcome the opportunity to work with you in  
9 supporting the WGA and SAGAFTRA and we look forward  
10 to collaborating with the City Council on the most  
11 effective strategies to support our fellow union  
12 members, and thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you so  
14 much. We have a few questions for the panel, but I  
15 want to recognize our colleagues from the committee  
16 who have joined us, Council Members Hanks, Feliz,  
17 Nurse, Cabán, Bottcher, Joseph, Dinowitz, and Council  
18 Member Moya on Zoom. So I have a question that I  
19 wanted to ask. So, the last writers' strike was 15  
20 years ago. How has the industry evolved in that  
21 time? Can you walk us through what that evolution  
22 looks like?

23 LOWELL PETERSON: I'll take a crack and  
24 then defer to my colleagues who've been working in  
25 the industry. But 15 years ago we thought what's

1 this thing called the internet. We called it new  
2 media. And we went on strike to get terms covering  
3 work created for the internet and work reused on the  
4 internet. We called it new media. It's still called  
5 new media, but it is the dominant media right now.  
6 What has happened in the past 15 years is this thing  
7 that seemed to be potentially disruptive has  
8 completely disrupted the entire industry, and the  
9 business models have changed in the ways that we've  
10 described in our testimony. The other thing that has  
11 happened frankly is just an enormous concentration of  
12 power on the other side of the table. The media  
13 companies have morphed into multi-national  
14 conglomerates, and big tech companies are media  
15 companies. So, we have to exercise that much more  
16 leverage just to get a seat at the table and get our  
17 voices heard.

19 LISA TAKEUCHI: I want to mention the  
20 decimation of residuals, because this is true for our  
21 actor colleagues as well. In that time, we have seen  
22 the checks that we used to receive for our work  
23 continuing in success, both as movies that have shown  
24 overseas or as broadcast television shows when they  
25 are shown on cable or other outlets, we would receive

1  
2 these checks that would help us to survive during the  
3 slow periods. And there are always slow periods,  
4 because jobs like ours do not last. We do not get--  
5 you elected folks would be well-familiar with this.  
6 You have to win your job again and again and again,  
7 and that's how actors and writers work. So we would  
8 get these checks that would pay our rent, that would  
9 pay for our groceries in between those jobs. That  
10 has gone away. If you ask any of the people here,  
11 they will show you a check that they have received  
12 for three cents, for two cents. It is unbelievable  
13 that these companies will continue to even print and  
14 mail these checks for stamps that cost more than the  
15 check value itself to us. It is an insult, and it  
16 must be changed.

17 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you. It  
18 is an insult. I agree with that statement. So,  
19 since the strike began, what steps-- can you describe  
20 what steps in your opinion the AMPTP has taken to  
21 negotiate with WGA representatives?

22 LOWELL PETERSON: None.

23 LISA TAEKUCHI: None.

24 VINCENT ALVAREZ: None.

25

1                   LOWELL PETERSON: Complete silence.

2  
3 We're ready to pick up the phone right now. They  
4 have completely stonewalled.

5                   CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: How has the  
6 strike put an economic strain on your members? Can  
7 you describe what your members are going through in  
8 this moment?

9                   LISA TAKEUCHI: So, this is three months,  
10 again, 14 weeks, 90+ days, and we are approaching 100  
11 days next Tuesday that our members have gone without  
12 an income at all. So imagine that for yourselves.  
13 Imagine going three months without a single check  
14 coming in to help pay for your kid's clothing, to  
15 help pay for groceries that you put on the table, pay  
16 for any bills at all. Our members are suffering.  
17 They are out there every single day on the picket  
18 lines. We had a period where we were shutting down  
19 productions, so they were out at 2:00 and 3:00 in the  
20 morning, again, without pay, without any form of  
21 compensation whatsoever. It is a tremendous hardship  
22 for all of our members. It is now a tremendous  
23 hardship for the 160,000 members of SAGAFTRA as well,  
24 and we only wish to go back and negotiate. That's all  
25 we're asking for is for them to come and engage with

1  
2 us on the proposals they have had before them since  
3 May 1<sup>st</sup>, since May 1<sup>st</sup>, and have not engaged on.

4 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Can you walk us  
5 through for the record-- we've heard some of it, but  
6 can you walk us through what our WGA's key concerns  
7 with the contract that has been offered at this point  
8 by the AMPTP?

9 LOWELL PETERSON: Well, the most  
10 important proposals have to do with the fact that the  
11 business model has changed. So, the ability to  
12 sustain a career has been undermined. So we have  
13 proposals that deal with staff size, make sure that  
14 there's enough people actually working so that they  
15 can earn a living, to make sure that the pay rates  
16 are high enough so that even if with shorter seasons,  
17 you can actually earn a living. To make sure--  
18 definitely to Lisa's point, to make sure that the  
19 residuals are sufficient in the streaming world, to  
20 make sure that the periods of employment are not so  
21 short, that they're meaningless. And yes, to make  
22 sure that there are guardrails around AI. The treat  
23 of generative artificial intelligence is very real.  
24 It doesn't necessarily mean that a robot's going to  
25 write an Academy award-winning script, but it will

1  
2 devalue our member's work. Now, those are the core  
3 proposals that we-- that the companies have simply  
4 refused to budget on. In fact, with respect to all  
5 the sort of career basis proposals we made, they said  
6 we're not going to talk to you about anything anymore  
7 unless you withdraw those proposals. That's not going  
8 to happen. They have to talk about all of it.

9 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Yeah. That  
10 doesn't seem like good faith. So, I do have a  
11 question for Vinny Alvarez. The prolonged production  
12 shutdown threatens to cost New York City tens of  
13 thousands of jobs this fall. The entertainment  
14 industry employed 101,000 people in New York City  
15 last year. What is the strikes economic impact on  
16 the City?

17 VINCENT ALVAREZ: Well, look, I think  
18 when you look at economic impact it's true. You can  
19 look at the statistics that you just pointed to and  
20 the loss of the jobs and the loss of economic impact.  
21 But I think you also have to look at what is the  
22 economic impact on these writers and these actors if  
23 they don't take a principle stand to defend the jobs  
24 and defend the livelihoods as they know them. What  
25 happens when even more actors can't access affordable



1 health insurance through their union? What happens  
2 and what's the economic impact if writers can't pay  
3 their rent due to a lack of work? What happens to  
4 our economy when these artists can't rely on the  
5 residuals that take them between jobs? And what  
6 happens to not only our city's-- our city's economy  
7 in the entertainment sector, but other industries too  
8 when artists and other workers are replaced by AI and  
9 thousands of workers are no longer needed? So I  
10 think we have to take the long-view here as well when  
11 we're looking at the specific sectors, these two  
12 sectors and these two strikes and understand that  
13 there's an economic impact certainly with the strike,  
14 but that-- that these issues, that they extend just  
15 beyond these two disputes, too. So I would approach  
16 it and ask you all to think about it from that  
17 perspective as well.

19 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you.  
20 Colleagues, any questions? Alright, well thank you  
21 so much for coming out today and for your testimony.  
22 We look forward to passing these resolutions in  
23 support of your industry. Thank you.

24 VINCENT ALVAREZ: Thank you very much.

25 LISA TAKEUCHI: Thank you.

2 LOWELL PETERSON: Thank you.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Now, we're going to  
4 turn to Council Member Fariás who is the co-sponsor  
5 of today's Pre-considered Resolution in support of  
6 SAGAFTRA.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER FARIÁS: Thank you so  
8 much, Committee Counsel, and thank you, Chair De La  
9 Rosa. I'm proud to see that this City Council  
10 continues to show unwavering support and solidarity  
11 for the union members of this city and across the  
12 country. before I was elected as Council Member, I  
13 worked with the Consortium for Worker Education for  
14 four years, building career pipelines for low-income  
15 New Yorkers of all ages to have access to unionized  
16 jobs, because through that access people were  
17 afforded living wages, healthcare, financial savings,  
18 pensions, and career advancement, all while building  
19 and advancing career. Right now, our country is  
20 witnessing the film and TV industry's first industry-  
21 wide shut down in 63 years. This historic strike  
22 that is taking place all across our city highlights  
23 the important need for the industry giants to  
24 acknowledge the ways our society and economy have  
25 changed since the COVID-19 pandemic and how their

1 workers deserve to be safeguarded and applauded for  
2 their adaptability and commitment, not disregarded.  
3 We see the parent companies of these films and shows,  
4 as consumers we all enjoy, making billions of dollars  
5 a year, but yet the faces and the writers of those  
6 productions, we do not get to see are not even making  
7 a living wage. In the Bronx, I get to represent a  
8 production studio, York Studios, and as Chair of the  
9 Committee on Economic Development, I've seen what  
10 economic drivers we can get from this industry to our  
11 cities, but it is nothing without all of the workers.  
12 We want a fair and protected equitable workplace for  
13 everyone, and that is why Chair De La Rosa and my  
14 Council colleagues and I have made it a priority to  
15 hear our two resolutions today. Thank you all for  
16 joining us, and I look forward to continuing to  
17 listening to testimony.

18  
19 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: thank you.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Now, for the second  
21 panel I'd like to call Rebecca Damon, Ezra Knight,  
22 and Fran Drescher to testify. You may begin when  
23 ready.

24 FRAN DESCHER: Now? You'll be sorry.

25 [laughter]

1  
2 FRAN DRESCHER: Okay. Well, hi, I'm Fran  
3 Drescher and I'm the President of SAGAFTRA, and I  
4 want to thank you all for allowing me this  
5 opportunity to speak to you today. As you can tell  
6 from my mellifluous accent, I am a New Yorker born  
7 and raised. As a kid back in Flushing Queens, I  
8 always dreamt of becoming a professional actor and  
9 becoming a member of the Screen Actors Guild, to be a  
10 part of the show business community and make a career  
11 out of my craft and my God-given talent was my  
12 ambition. But I never imagined that show business  
13 which was so romanticized in the old movies of the  
14 30s and 40s would in 2023 become a soulless business  
15 of greed and disrespect for the performing artist.  
16 The AMPTP has so radically changed the business model  
17 that a new structure of the contract is demanded. We  
18 can longer live on the residual model. Yet, we were  
19 stonewalled when we said that we have to follow the  
20 money in the new model. How is anybody going to make  
21 their medical coverage when they are making two-  
22 thirds less residuals with this new business model?  
23 The answer is they can't. How are working people  
24 supposed to make a living on two-thirds less  
25 opportunities to make residuals? How can they think

1 we can accept minimums which is the equivalent of  
2 minimum wage in the real world? How could they think  
3 that we're going to accept their final offer on  
4 minimums that in real money is less than 2020? And  
5 they want us to take that all the way to 2026? We  
6 must catch up with inflation. And where do they have  
7 the audacity to want a background performer to get  
8 paid for one day, get their likeness scanned, and  
9 then they own it in perpetuity? What is going to  
10 happen to that worker? We stand on the front line of  
11 a workers' movement. This is happening all over and  
12 everywhere. I was in my neighborhood back in Los  
13 Angeles and there was a little box floating around--  
14 rolling around making deliveries, and I thought that  
15 used to be a human being on a bicycle. What happened  
16 to that person? They are out of a job. We cannot  
17 allow big business greed to take away our careers, to  
18 take away our livelihoods. The buck stops here. We  
19 are at a very serious crossroads. This is a  
20 righteous fight, and they are on the wrong side of  
21 history. The AMPTP's maniacal corporate culture for  
22 greed must stop. Industry profit and doing the right  
23 thing on behalf of workers does not have to be  
24

1  
2 mutually exclusive, but go hand-in-hand as we define  
3 the new meaning for success. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you.

5 EZRA KNIGHT: Hi. I'm on? Yeah. I'd  
6 like to thank the City Council and the Committee for  
7 having us here. It's an honor. My name is Ezra  
8 Knight. I am a professional actor. New York City is  
9 my home. I'm a proud long-time resident of Harlem.  
10 I've been able to raise two daughters in New York  
11 City working in this incredible profession that I  
12 love thanks to good union jobs. I have had and I am  
13 a proud union performer, and that is how I pay my  
14 bills, how I put bacon on the table, turkey bacon on  
15 the table. I'm going to be a little healthier here.  
16 And how I earn health coverage for my family and  
17 myself. It's how I earn a pension so I can save for  
18 retirement, and how I live a decent middle-class life  
19 in the Big Apple. But the possibility of making a  
20 good middle-class living as a journeyman actor in New  
21 York City is becoming-- it's being snatched away by  
22 the greedy corporations who don't see actors as the  
23 assets that we are, because they can only see their  
24 bottom line. You hear a repeating theme here. Good  
25 union jobs treat workers with respect and see them as

1 people with agency. The AMPTP doesn't want to talk  
2 to us about sharing the profits of streaming, or  
3 about putting real fences around the use of AI in  
4 order to allow performers to say how their likenesses  
5 will be used without diminishing the number of jobs  
6 available. The AMPTP corporations have no interest  
7 in showing their workers any respect. I'm here today  
8 as a member also of the SAGAFTRA TV Theatrical  
9 Negotiating Committee who worked on this contract and  
10 these negotiations. I speak to you on behalf also of  
11 my fellow union members and alongside our siblings in  
12 the WGA. We are all in a righteous life or death  
13 fight for fair contract, which at this moment is  
14 nothing less than an existential battle for our place  
15 in the future of this industry. We want the AMPTP to  
16 hear us loud and clear. Ours is part of an  
17 international struggle for fair compensation of  
18 respect for labor. Our support comes from the  
19 audiences how are moved by the stories we tell, moved  
20 to tears, to laughter. We feel our art is important  
21 and a necessary element of a society's healthy  
22 existence. Our support comes from our fellow  
23 members. It comes from our sibling unions who've  
24 shown us incredible solidarity throughout these  
25

2 strikes, and it comes from you at City Hall. And  
3 this is why we will continue to fight the good fight.  
4 We will continue to make our voices heard loud and  
5 clear. We will not lose resolve knowing, again, that  
6 we are on the right side of history. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you.

8 REBECCA DAMON: I can hear the applause  
9 behind me for these two speakers. Hi there. I'm  
10 Rebecca Damon. I'm the Executive Director of  
11 SAGAFTRA New York for Labor Policy and International  
12 Affairs, and it is an honor and privilege to be here  
13 today with this historic-- and we like the word  
14 historic in SAGAFTRA-- this historic first-time  
15 female majority-led Council. It is-- yeah, people  
16 can't help the woo on that one. Being here today  
17 with the Committee on Civil Service and Labor with  
18 Council Members Carmen, Amanda, and all of you, it is  
19 like for me coming home. This council has stood up  
20 for the workers in New York City time and time again,  
21 and never more so than today and in this hot labor  
22 summer that we're all having. I want to thank you  
23 for this resolution expressing the unwavering support  
24 in our pursuit for a fair and just contract. We are  
25 grateful to this body because it has been a supporter



1 of these good union jobs created by the robust film,  
2 television, and streaming production sector. And I  
3 appreciate the opportunity to give folks in this room  
4 and across the City some context on what that looks  
5 like. SAGAFTRA's TV theatrical streaming contracts  
6 cover over 200,000 jobs a year for New York  
7 performers. That work translates in approximately a  
8 half a billion dollars a year in covered earnings for  
9 New York performers and makes New York City the  
10 second largest global production hub for SAGAFTRA  
11 covered entertainment after Los Angeles. A recent  
12 study conducted by the Mayor's Office of Media and  
13 Entertainment found that the entire film and  
14 television industry in New York City is responsible  
15 for over \$18 billion a year in total wages, and over  
16 \$80 billion in total economic output for the City.  
17 New York is also home to the two main exchanges where  
18 these two media conglomerates are traded. Stocks  
19 that in aggregate reflect a total market  
20 capitalization over \$600 billion dollars. So these  
21 studio segments of these media conglomerates are  
22 booking annual revenues of over \$120 billion as they  
23 generate work using our members and the members of  
24 the WGA's work in netting profits of over \$12 billion  
25

1 dollars a year. These are really fantastic numbers,  
2 and I'm so grateful to see them, but you would think  
3 that that wave of success could be shared by the  
4 workers in these industries. The AMPTP corporations  
5 have changed course without bringing their workers  
6 along for the ride. The migration to the streaming  
7 business model coupled with the effects of inflation  
8 have eroded the real value of wages under these  
9 contracts. The fight for a fair contract is a fight  
10 for a living wage, but it is also the fight for  
11 agency. With the development of AI, the producers  
12 want to be able to use our members' likeness however  
13 and wherever they want. As President Drescher said,  
14 to be paid for that day of work and then be out of  
15 work for a background performer or day-player, that  
16 is the loss of being able to do what you have spent  
17 your whole life training for. Without that  
18 additional pay, without the certainty of meaningful  
19 incent [sic], we find it unacceptable. We cannot  
20 stand by while the corporation use these insidious  
21 practices to enrich themselves without the regard for  
22 the effects on the workers whose faces and voices  
23 they want to steal. We know that this body  
24 understand the contribution of our 36,000 New York  
25

2 members and our 160,000 members across this nation  
3 and around the world, but the cultural effect on this  
4 great city and the support that you are showing for  
5 SAGAFTRA members in this fight to get working people  
6 across their city and their contributions matter is  
7 valued today. And on behalf of SAGAFTRA we thank  
8 you.

9 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you.

10 Thank you so much for your testimony. We do have  
11 some questions. I'll start off by asking. In 2021,  
12 SAGAFTRA actors made a median salary income of  
13 \$46,960 which far below the median US-- median  
14 income. A lot of people were shocked by that number.  
15 What retirement plans are available for those actors?  
16 What retirement benefits is SAGAFTRA fighting for?  
17 And can we talk a little bit about-- you know, people  
18 usually think actors, A List actors, they're making  
19 millions and millions of dollars. Can you talk about  
20 those workers that are directly living in this  
21 reality?

22 FRAN DRESCHER: Here we go. I just want  
23 to say that when we look at an average salary, that's  
24 incorporating a lot of very high salaries that are in  
25 the one percentile. I just want to put it back into

1 the proper perspective that 86 percent of our members  
2 cannot even meet the \$26.5 thousand dollar threshold  
3 that would make them eligible for their medical  
4 coverage. So, 86 percent is not even making \$26.5.  
5 So the median is misleading, because it incorporates  
6 a very small percentile of very high-earning  
7 performers who actually become the engine that makes  
8 everything run. So, you know, that's kind of where  
9 we're at. We're fighting for those people, that 86  
10 percent, and those are the people that bring every  
11 scene we see to life. Every piece of entertainment  
12 that we see on the big screen or on the television  
13 screen is-- maybe has one star in it, and then  
14 everybody else is virtually unknown, but they are the  
15 edges of life. The very-- we are the foundation of  
16 this industry. We are the center of the wheel. They  
17 cannot do it without us, and the mentality to think  
18 that they have to step on us, screw us, compromise  
19 us, instead of respect us, honor us, and say thank  
20 you, we're in it together-- shows the kind of the  
21 leadership that is no longer acceptable in this  
22 moment.

23  
24 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you so  
25 much for those comments. It also speaks to income

1 inequality and why that gap continues to widen in our  
2 city. We know that the cost of living is sky-high,  
3 and we know that communities are being priced out. I  
4 want to talk a little bit to AMPTP's rejection of  
5 SAGAFTRA's proposal to implement guidelines around  
6 the use of artificial intelligence. We heard a  
7 little bit about it in your testimonies. By why are  
8 those safeguards around AI so crucial in this fight  
9 for your members?  
10

11 EZRA KNIGHT: I'd say it's an existential  
12 reality. We are aware that AI is something that's  
13 been created, we're not denying that fact. We're  
14 not-- eliminate AI is not the goal. It's to  
15 acknowledge an existence to put fences around it that  
16 are respectful for our members, to see its place and  
17 its potential in the creative space that's going to  
18 be beneficial to us as opposed to the pattern. It's  
19 the pattern that we question that's been so  
20 repetitively disadvantageous to us as performers and  
21 members. So we see it as this new bastion part of  
22 the questions around it. It seems to be taken as an  
23 opportunity to abuse those privileges and those-- and  
24 their power to the disadvantage of us. so it's  
25 something that we that very, very seriously, and I

1 think we've all kind of spoken to it in a way,  
2 because that's the new terrain that's going to affect  
3 everyone all over the planet, but certainly in our  
4 industry. It's a very, very large harbinger of  
5 what's to come and what's to protect.

7 REBECCA DAMON: I would simply that there  
8 are two principles of compensation and consent.  
9 People should be able to control an actual meaningful  
10 consent around their voices, their images and  
11 likenesses. Unfortunately, this industry has fought  
12 in that space. They fought us in Albany. They  
13 fought us in Sacramento. There is a prevalence of  
14 not thinking that people should have that sort of  
15 creative control, that sort of control over the  
16 destiny of their own persona. And the other key  
17 piece is compensation, and that for us is a key issue  
18 that must be acknowledged in this negotiation.

19 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: It seems to me  
20 that there's an opportunity here given that AI isn't  
21 going anywhere and that we have to get used to this  
22 new reality for a framework to be developed given  
23 that you all are back at the negotiating table again  
24 in three years. Can you speak to what that framework  
25 should look like?

1  
2 REBECCA DAMON: SAGAFTRA has been  
3 involved in something called the Human Artistry  
4 Campaign, and that campaign has to do with the  
5 entertainment industry but also deals with the music  
6 industry as well. You can look at Human Artistry,  
7 the website, to go through the principles. Those  
8 principles are very similar to the things that we're  
9 looking for in negotiations. If you look at the fact  
10 at how much technology has progressed, and SAGAFTRA  
11 as a union has been on the forefront of addressing  
12 technology at every turn along the way, whether  
13 that's all the way back to the silent pictures, when  
14 people talked about the talkies, or now. Our  
15 national board firmly understands the change in  
16 technology, but also doesn't want to put our heads in  
17 the sand around these topics. The technology is  
18 moving at a pace that what was issues at the day that  
19 they began negotiations, the technology has already  
20 evolved. So the idea that we would wait for some  
21 period of time for some three years in order to  
22 address these issues, whether that's us or the WGA,  
23 that is wholly unacceptable.

24 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you.  
25

2 FRAN DRESCHER: I just want to say that  
3 when we-- I feel like we're at an inflection point  
4 here. Just because there are people in Silicon Valley  
5 that can-- has a kind of a brain that can come up  
6 with something doesn't mean that it's necessarily  
7 good to use or incorporate in anybody's business or  
8 lives. If there's no empathy that comes along with  
9 invention, then we're heading-- we're barreling into  
10 a world that I personally don't want to experience.  
11 Everybody owes it to each other as human beings to  
12 think about what the consequence of something may be  
13 in the long-run, to look down the line. Indigenous  
14 people look at seven generations, but in our society  
15 where the bottom line is the bottom line, nobody is  
16 concerned about how their invention is going to  
17 impact people, planet, and other life on this planet.  
18 We are really fast-moving into an insane reality. So  
19 I do not accept that we have to accept anything. We  
20 have to start questioning everything, and if somebody  
21 comes up with something that seems like it's a good  
22 idea on the surface, if you don't dig deeper than  
23 that, than get out of my way, please.

24 [applause]



2 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you.

3 Thank you. It's okay. It's okay. We allow a little  
4 rule-breaking here. Okay. So, we're going to pass  
5 it on to the colleagues who have some questions.

6 Council Member Bottcher followed by Council Member  
7 Farías.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: Thank you so  
9 much for being here today. I want to give a special  
10 shout-out to Rebecca Damon who's been so  
11 communicative and just excellent through this  
12 process, and of course, you President Knight and  
13 President Drescher. President Drescher, I represent  
14 the neighborhoods of the Village, Chelsea, and Hell's  
15 Kitchen, Midtown, lots of--

16 FRAN DRESCHER: [interposing] Them's are my  
17 peeps.

18 [laughter]

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: lots of  
20 writers, and one thing that they've been complaining  
21 to me about especially since the pandemic started was  
22 self-tape auditions, where an actor has to tape their  
23 own-- perform a scene, tape it, send it in. Could  
24 you tell the public why those are problematic and how  
25 that's factoring into your negotiations?

1  
2           FRAN DRESCHER: That is a very big part  
3 of our proposal package. There's a whole section,  
4 and we have experts as part of our negotiating  
5 committee that have spent a very long amount of time  
6 working on this and on the boots-- boots on the  
7 ground speaking to our members about the problems  
8 that this poses. And this is something that really  
9 kind of birthed out of the COVID crisis when people  
10 weren't going into offices, but then as per usual, it  
11 seemed like well, if they're willing to do a self-  
12 tape audition, we won't have to get offices. We  
13 won't have to pay rent. We won't have to sit there  
14 and watch all of them. They can just send in all of  
15 their videos, and this creates a massive problem  
16 because my job is not to be a tech specialists.  
17 Particularly with our older members that are not tech  
18 savvy at all. I mean, I don't want to generalize,  
19 but this is what I'm hearing, that that community has  
20 a lot of complaints about that, and there is an  
21 impersonalness [sic] about trying to put something on  
22 tape when in the past we would walk into a room and  
23 we could have a conversation and it was human. We  
24 would engage another human being. That has all gone  
25 away. Also the demands have become greater and

1 greater. Do this. Do that. Can you do it in this  
2 style? Can you do it-- you know, can you do 12  
3 pages? Can you memorize it? Can you do it in two  
4 different accents? And it's like-- it's gone so far  
5 in the wrong direction that it has to have, again,  
6 just like with AI, barricades put around it, and  
7 there has to be a happy medium or we want to get paid  
8 for it.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Council Member  
12 Farías?

13 COUNCIL MEMBER FARIÁS: Thank you so  
14 much. I just have a question about-- what do you  
15 think about the AMPTP's role should be in addressing  
16 the discrepancies between these multi-billion-dollar  
17 streaming services and the actors who help generate  
18 these profits? I'm hearing a lot of different things  
19 around how we continuously are the ones generating  
20 the profits and moving the items forward, but  
21 obviously we're not seeing it back and that is the  
22 gist of the fight here, and I just want to hear your  
23 thoughts if possible.

24 FRAN DRESCHER: Well, they're both  
25 looking at me, so-- I'll speak. I think that there

1 is-- there-- that-- they are profit-making machines,  
2 but when the success is of the CEO, it's completely  
3 tied in with the success that he generates on Wall  
4 Street by 400 percent bonuses. Some of them make  
5 \$78,000 a day and are accusing us of being  
6 unrealistic in our asks. Talk about tone deaf. So  
7 there is obviously money there, but there is this  
8 culture, this greed-based corporate culture to try  
9 and squeeze us out of every last nickel so that it  
10 can show as more profit in the minds of the  
11 shareholders. The whole culture is what needs to  
12 change, because we're too foundational to their  
13 business model. It's completely counterintuitive to  
14 try and screw those that are the foundation of your  
15 business model. We're not grapefruits growing in an  
16 orchard. We're people. We are artists. We make  
17 massive contributions to this industry. We have to  
18 be thought of as a partner. I'm not counting your  
19 shekels, but cut me in for God sakes.

21 EZRA KNIGHT: I have an additional  
22 thought. I just last night, not to be too tangential  
23 here, it's actually on-point. I was watching Air,  
24 about Michael Jordan, and the gumption of him, his  
25 family to ask for a percentage of each sneaker sold

1 with his name on it was unthinkable. It was  
2 unrealistic. It wasn't how the business model worked.  
3 It wasn't how the profit system conducted itself, but  
4 the ask and the bold courageous move to ask for that  
5 and to actually get it-- we're Michael Jordan. It is  
6 our name, our face, our likenesses on these products,  
7 we should get a percentage of that. One of Fran's  
8 biggest heroic ask was about the streaming sharing  
9 profit system that we should be a part of. We should  
10 have a piece of the successful streaming content that  
11 airs and we should have a part of that cut, because  
12 it's there to be had.

14 FRAN DRESCHER: Revenue sharing.

15 EZRA KNIGHT: Revenue sharing.

16 FRAN DRESCHER: of subscriptions.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER FARIÁS: Yeah, well, I  
18 appreciate your responses. I do think like this is  
19 just so reminiscent of every single union fight that  
20 we have. It's capitalism at its finest. You have  
21 someone that doesn't want to really breakdown their  
22 shares and wants to keep having more shares. So I  
23 appreciate all of you being with us and testifying  
24 today.

25

2 FRAN DRESCHER: Yeah, there's such a  
3 thing as conscious capitalism, and that's what  
4 capitalism has to mature into. Otherwise, it's going  
5 to self-destruct because it's unsustainable the way  
6 it is now.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER FARIÁS: Hundred percent.  
8 Thank you so much.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much  
10 to this panel.

11 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you.

12 FRAN DRESCHER: Are we excused?

13 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Yeah.

14 [applause]

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We are going to pause  
16 here and prepare for a vote on the two resolutions  
17 before continuing with public testimony. I'm going  
18 to turn to the Chair for her thoughts, and then we'll  
19 transition to the vote.

20 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you. We  
21 want to thank the WGA and SAGAFTRA members for their  
22 valuable testimony today. Striking writers and  
23 actors are not just fighting for their own  
24 livelihoods as you heard today, but against a  
25 displacement of workers in their fields. Countless

2 workers from warehouse employees to retail cashiers  
3 to computer coders fear that their jobs will become  
4 obsolete due to the development of artificial  
5 intelligence. It is incumbent upon government to  
6 regulate the extent at which automation and  
7 artificial intelligence displace human labor. Today,  
8 the City Council stands with the WGA and SAGAFTRA by  
9 uplifting their campaign to protect workers. I  
10 proudly support today's resolutions, and I will turn  
11 to the clerk to call the roll.

12 COUNCIL CLERK: Good afternoon. William  
13 Martin, Committee Clerk, roll call vote Committee on  
14 Civil Service and Labor. Both items are coupled.  
15 Chair De La Rosa?

16 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Aye.

17 COUNCIL CLERK: Moya? Council Member  
18 Moya?

19 COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: [inaudible]

20 COUNCIL CLERK: Council Member Moya, we  
21 will come back. Thank you. Dinowitz?

22 COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: Sorry.

23 COUNCIL CLERK: One more time. Council  
24 Member Moya?

25

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: Sorry, couldn't  
3 unmute. I vote aye.

4 COUNCIL CLERK: Thank you, sir.  
5 Dinowitz?

6 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Aye.

7 COUNCIL CLERK: Feliz?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: Proudly vote yes,  
9 and for everyone who has joined today I want to thank  
10 you all for fighting for what's right. Thank you.

11 COUNCIL CLERK: Bottcher?

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: Aye.

13 COUNCIL CLERK: Cabán?

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Aye.

15 COUNCIL CLERK: Hanks?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HANKS: I vote aye.

17 COUNCIL CLERK: Joseph?

18 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: I vote aye.

19 COUNCIL CLERK: Nurse?

20 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: I vote aye, and  
21 congratulations.

22 COUNCIL CLERK: With a vote of 9 in the  
23 affirmative, 0 in the negative, and no abstentions,  
24 both resolutions have been adopted by the Committee.



2 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Y'all can clap.  
3 Y'all can clap.

4 [applause]

5 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Alright, we'll  
6 continue with public testimony.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We're going to  
8 continue with public testimony. I'd like to call on  
9 Lewis Edward Thompson, Rao Rampilla, and Layla  
10 Johnson, and Shade Bass [sp?] to come up and testify.  
11 You may begin when the Sergeant starts your clock.

12 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Identify  
13 yourself, and--

14 RAO RAMPILLA: My name is Rao Rampilla.  
15 I'm a member of SAGAFTRA. I'm a full-time actor,  
16 working actor. I used to be an international lawyer  
17 with five law degrees, worked for the United Nations  
18 Legal Office. After 9/11 I became an accidental  
19 actor. But because of the fight they fought in 60s,  
20 I was one of the beneficiaries. So now comes the  
21 turning point. We also hurt a lot during the  
22 pandemic. Residuals were almost nothing. They were  
23 getting some, but not like it used to be. Now comes  
24 the AI and others things like they spoke earlier.  
25 The reason I'm saying is-- I just want to tell my

1 personal story. To me, art in civilization is a  
2 super-structure, economy is the base. In a way,  
3 artists, writers, actors in this capitalist society,  
4 we are the end [sic] guard. And we are giving a  
5 warning to the other people where it might go.  
6 Today, it is us. Tomorrow, it will be everyone after  
7 you. What if this [inaudible] Council Member decide  
8 what the Council Member may think and decide on what-  
9 - what if-- I mean, I used to-- I live near United  
10 Nations. I used to work 9:00 to 5:00. I used to  
11 have good insurance, health insurance. Now, you  
12 don't qualify for Medicare and you don't get SAG  
13 insurance. Where are you? We are not beggars.  
14 Artists are not beggars. We didn't come here today  
15 to beg anyone. We came here to demand. So, what is  
16 profit? Profit is self-less labor. It's not  
17 somebody's money. It's the labor accumulated by  
18 stealing from people like us. I-- and there is no--  
19 there's nothing in the Constitution says this is a  
20 capitalist society. So, it's-- but it's been  
21 evolving. I'm not here to talk about it, but this is  
22 what is going on. Like, our leader said, it's going  
23 to affect everyone. We're at the beginning. So  
24 yeah, I giving a warning as a vanguard. Common  
25

2 people, working people, [inaudible] may not be able  
3 to think, but we are there in their shoes now. Thank  
4 you.

5 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you.

6 BETHANY LAYLA JOHNSON: Hello, I'm  
7 Bethany Layla Johnson. I am a proud SAGAFTRA member.  
8 I'm also a former Council Liaison. For 14 years my  
9 mother was a City Council woman for the City of East  
10 Orange [sic], and I'd just like to thank a moment.  
11 Lieutenant Governor of New Jersey, Sheila Oliver, she  
12 ran her office. So I know where many of you sit. I  
13 live in SoHo. I have been fighting to keep my  
14 apartment. It is a joint living work quarters for  
15 artists. I'm one but three artists in a 13-unit  
16 apartment building, yet they hold JLWQA status. This  
17 is something the City Council needs to look at,  
18 because many of us sitting in this room today qualify  
19 for that housing, yet, it has been absconded not only  
20 by millionaires, but by the many corporate giants who  
21 would like to scan us and take our image, reuse it  
22 countless times. This is something that this Council  
23 can pass up and act on actively. I've reached out to  
24 the Public Advocate's office in assisting and helping  
25 me keep my home and keep an income while we fight

1 this fight. I'm on the picket lines every day and I  
2 hear various stories, and while we've discussed AI,  
3 let it be known that we have been living and working  
4 with green screens since as far back as Forest Gump.  
5 We know it has a place in this industry, but for us  
6 to be recycled and reused for nothing, for one day's  
7 pay is unconscionable when we bring over \$500 billion  
8 dollars to United States economy alone. We create  
9 worlds for people. The epic shows such as Blue  
10 Bloods, Law & Order, and New York Undercover that  
11 created the economy or the boost to the entertainment  
12 economy in New York City should never be overlooked.  
13 Not the people, not the guest players, not the day  
14 players, and what we would call background or extras.  
15 We all create that world happily, proudly. There is  
16 not one of us sitting here that does not want to be  
17 working right now. There is not one, one of us, that  
18 would say that we would rather be in 90-degree heat  
19 rather than being 90-degree heat on a set. But also,  
20 while we are negotiating, it is AI, it is healthcare.  
21 I have been on sets where we are-- there is no  
22 requirement for someone like me from being an  
23 intimate scene to be protected. There are children  
24 on set that need to be protected, and all of this is  
25

1 being negotiated by our negotiating team, but I feel  
2 the messaging about AI is being pushed forward rather  
3 than healthcare, access to food, access to chairs,  
4 access to the minimal working condition that the  
5 companies or the studios, production companies feel  
6 themselves absolved from actually, you know,  
7 providing to us, including a livable wage. Remember,  
8 86 percent, and I am one of them, live below the  
9 poverty line. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you.

12 LEWIS EDWARD THOMPSON: Here we go.  
13 Thank you for having us here. My name is Lewis Edward  
14 Thompson, and also people have nicknamed me the  
15 Celebrity Waiter. I used to be a waiter at  
16 T.G.I.Fridays. As a matter of fact, straight up the  
17 block from Rockefeller Center, 14 years. It's  
18 amazing because one day we were in a bus stand and my  
19 fellow coworkers were talking to me and they said  
20 we've seen a lot of stuff, man. You're a celebrity.  
21 And I go, no I'm not. Guys, I'm doing background  
22 work. I'm trying to make things happen. The go,  
23 Lewis, you're a celebrity. It took them a couple  
24 minutes to convince me I'm a celebrity. And as they  
25 nicknamed me the celebrity waiter, I speak to you as

1 a celebrity and I speak to all those studio  
2 executives. I've met people like that. I went to  
3 school with them. I went to college, grammar school,  
4 high school. I hung with them. I got stoned with  
5 them. I got drunk with them. But in all that time,  
6 I was always listening because that's what my two  
7 black parents taught all seven of their black  
8 children, listen and learn. My skin does not make me  
9 up, I do, but my skin is important, just like white  
10 people, just like brown people, just like Asian,  
11 Native American Indian. We're all in this together.  
12 I'm surprised at the greed of the corporate people  
13 right now. They should be spreading the wealth a lot  
14 more. Why? Because with AI done-- and we saw this  
15 as children when we read comic books, when we saw  
16 science fiction, when we spoke among ourselves, we  
17 knew this was coming. Apparently, a lot of people  
18 did not. Well, it's here. It's the 21<sup>st</sup> century and  
19 now it's here, and we better watch out. They  
20 particularly better watch out. And why? Because it  
21 doesn't matter. AI is a damn good thing. It's a good  
22 tool, but it can also be used for evil. I've seen it.  
23 I've seen the geniuses out there. They know what  
24 they're doing, but there are also good people who are  
25

1  
2 geniuses who know what they're doing. So I have a  
3 warning for the studios and all those rich people out  
4 there that think that they have so much. I also work  
5 in the elections, too, so I'm getting my hands on  
6 just about everything. I have a warning for all of  
7 them. They may think that they're in charge, but  
8 they're not. They're going to lose all of their  
9 money one day, because it's very possible to take it  
10 away from them. I've seen it. I worked in Wall  
11 Street also as a securities clerk and foot messenger,  
12 and I've hung with a lot of people and partied with a  
13 lot of people. This is my warning to them. I thank  
14 God for this and Fran and everybody here, but my  
15 warning to them is-- and if you'll excuse me--  
16 karma's a bitch. What goes around comes around and  
17 when it comes for them it's not going to be very good  
18 because they won't know how to handle it. I've also  
19 worked on yachts. They're nice. It was fun. But I  
20 don't want to own one. All I want to do is pay my  
21 bills, make a lot of money, be happy like everybody  
22 else here and get the speaking parts. I want the  
23 speaking parts. I need them. Thank you very much.

24 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you for  
25 your testimony. Thank you.

2 BETHANY LAYLA THOMPSON: May I just add,  
3 there's one line that stuck in my head. It was  
4 written by a writer on a television show called  
5 Network before I was born, 1976. I'm a mad as hell  
6 and I'm not going to take it anymore. Thank you.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Our last panel will  
8 be Jackie Roth [sp?], Rocky Bonifield, Jenna Kray.  
9 Hi, we'll call the names again. Jenna Cray, Jackie  
10 Roth, Rocky Bonifield. Please identify yourself and  
11 begin when ready.

12 ROCKY BONIFIELD: Hi, my name is Rocky  
13 Bonifield and I'm so nervous to be up here and to be  
14 speaking. I felt compelled to speak just because my  
15 SAGAFTRA card says that I've been a member since 1974  
16 and I've been a performer before that, since I was  
17 four years old. And at that time, I don't believe  
18 there were child labor laws, and if there were, my  
19 family didn't, you know, abide by them. So, I didn't  
20 see any income from when I worked, and honestly, the  
21 entertainment industry is the one good thing that was  
22 in my childhood, and I have never left the  
23 entertainment industry. I've worked behind the  
24 scenes. I've worked as a dancer. I've done stunts.  
25 I have a degree, a Master's Degree in theater. I've



1 done theater. I've done every aspect of this in this  
2 entertainment industry. And at one point, I don't  
3 know if people remember this, but SAGAFTRA, they were  
4 two different entities. So I belonged to SAGAFTRA.  
5 I belonged to AGVA [sic]. I belonged to Equity. So,  
6 and you had to reach that minimum that you're talking  
7 about in each one of those things, but I would go  
8 from Equity to AFTRA, to SAG, and so there was no way  
9 I could ever meet, you know, those-- the bar would  
10 keep getting raised, and I could never meet it, and  
11 at some point it gets very discouraging, and-- when I  
12 was very young I was in a movie, Walt Disney-- Disney  
13 seems to be a theme here. But I was in a Disney  
14 movie called Pete's Dragon, and I was one of Pete's  
15 friends. They have a school yard. They have-- and I  
16 danced and I did-- I was in a harness on the top of a  
17 sail which is now considered stunts, but what's  
18 happened through the years is that children at that  
19 age doing that film, I haven't received a dime of  
20 residual. Do you know much money that film has made?  
21 I have-- not a dime. And that's just one of the  
22 examples, but also as an actor we're being asked to  
23 do stunts. We're being asked to-- as not even as an  
24 actor, as a background performer. We're asked to do  
25

1 things that are impossible, and because of how I was  
2 raised, I will do whatever you ask me to for free,  
3 and this is why this needs to be addressed now.

4 Thank you.

5  
6 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you so  
7 much for sharing.

8 JENNA KRAY: Hi everyone. Can you hear  
9 me now? Hi, everyone. My name's Jenna Kray. I have  
10 been a member of SAG since 2021. Started out as a  
11 background actor and I've worked on three HBO shows  
12 now, NBC, Showtime, and it's been a great come-up  
13 during a weird time. And I was in my first Netflix  
14 film. It was very meaningful to me based on my  
15 favorite book. We filmed a few streets over from  
16 where we are today on Broadway. It was the day after  
17 my birthday. What a dream come true, right? It was  
18 also a tough day because the book is about being a  
19 survivor of sexual assault and as a survivor myself  
20 it's emotional to do roles like that and share in  
21 that part of your artistry, that part of yourself. I  
22 also found out on my way to the job that my  
23 grandmother had passed away. I knew that I would  
24 likely be replaced or the part would be cut from the  
25 movie, so I made the uncomfortable choice to work

1 that day. It was pretty unbearable. The movie came  
2 out. The movie was in the number one spot for quite  
3 some time. There was a posting that it had been  
4 watched for over 43 million hours in the first week,  
5 just the first week. So that's about a two-hour  
6 movie, so over 2.2 million people had seen this. And  
7 these are the kinds of numbers that we never see.  
8 That's the crazy part about a lot of this is we don't  
9 even understand the scope of which we're being  
10 perceived. They don't even want us to know those  
11 numbers, because then we'd know how much we're really  
12 getting screwed. So I saw that number and I broke it  
13 down, and I was like dang, this residual might be  
14 okay. I got it. It was late also. Summed up to  
15 about \$200 dollars, and that's probably the biggest  
16 one I'm going to see. I made \$200 dollars to work on  
17 the day my grandmother died, and I just wonder how  
18 much they made that day. Also, the crazy thing about  
19 that is I started as a background actor, and if they  
20 had the money to turn me into an AI which I don't  
21 think anyone even really wants-- like, there's nobody  
22 who's like, hey, Bob Iger, like can you make actors  
23 like a little bit more like robotic and like weird?  
24 That's what we really want. Like, no one's even  
25

2 asking for that. So like, what a weird idea in the  
3 first place. Sorry. But if that had been the case  
4 and they took my image, like, okay, how do I move up  
5 from that point? How do I go from co-start to guest-  
6 star? Do you own me forever and then you can just do  
7 whatever you want with me, and then me as a real  
8 person ever gets to move up and make choices? It  
9 eliminates the ability to move up in this industry,  
10 and that's another reason it's really important.  
11 Thank you for taking the time to listen today. I  
12 appreciate it, and I appreciate all of you. I'm so  
13 proud of all of you.

14 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you so  
15 much for your testimony.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: One more time, I'm  
17 just going to call Jackie Roth, see if she's in the  
18 room and available to testify. Okay, I'm going to--  
19 Chair De La Rosa's going to give her concluding  
20 thoughts.

21 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Well, I want to  
22 thank you all for coming out today, for-- to my  
23 colleagues for standing in solidarity. We are here  
24 because this council understands the value of the  
25 work that you bring to our city. We value the work

2 of the Writers Guild of America and your members. We  
3 value the work of SAGAFTRA and your members, and we  
4 stand as a council prepared to pass this resolution  
5 this week in support of a thriving New York City and  
6 a thriving workforce. So thank you so much for being  
7 here, and we look forward to celebrating your victory  
8 pretty soon. Thank you.

9 [applause]

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

COMMITTEE ON CIVIL SERVICE & LABOR

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date August 7, 2023