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UAW votes to divest from Israel Bonds

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Benson vows support for 'union values' at UAW convention

Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson speaks to attendees at the UAW Constitutional Convention at Huntington Place on Thursday, June 18, 2026.

Detroit — United Auto Workers delegates on Thursday voted in a narrow decision to amend their constitution prohibiting investment in Israel Bonds, a mark of a sea change in the union's politics, according to experts.

The passage is expected to result in the divestment of at least \$400,000 in Israel Bonds, according to the passed resolution and the Unite All for Workers for Democracy caucus within the Detroit-based union focused on "class struggle" that pushed for the resolution. Israel Bonds is the common name for Development Corp. for Israel, which is the broker-dealer that underwrites and markets debt securities issued by the State of Israel in the United States. Proceeds from the sales support Israel's government.

"I don't just hope, but I know," said Olga Karounos, 33, a public defender in Brooklyn, New York, from Local 3235 who made a motion to call the amendment out of committee, "that this is going to send a message to — not just the billionaire class — but to politicians and any single person who is not afraid of standing up to genocide, to (Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu, to the United States government, and will put the UAW again on the map for standing for international solidarity."

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United Auto Workers delegates attending the constitutional convention on Thursday voted to divest union funds from Israel Bonds, the common name for Development Corp. for Israel, which is the broker-dealer that underwrites and markets debt securities issued by the State of Israel in the United States. *Clarence Tabb Jr., The Detroit News*

The amendment passed with almost 53% support: 321 for and 287 against, according to the UAWD. In its reasoning for the divestment, the resolution cites the ability of the "billionaire class" to profit from war that encourages militarism over investment for health care, housing or education, the deaths in Gaza from "Israel's genocide," Israeli organizations like labor federation Histadrut working to "undermine global worker unity by furthering settler colonialism, apartheid, dispossession, and genocide" and "an injury to Palestine is an injury to all." As a result, "no UAW funds shall be invested in Israel Bonds."

A request for comment was sent on Thursday afternoon to the media email of Israel Bonds and to the Jewish Federation of Detroit.

It wasn't immediately clear the financial impact of the resolution on the union. The costs of divestment could depend on how the bonds are structured. Divesting bonds before maturity also can result in a loss of

money. Execution of the resolution will be in the hands of the International Executive Board governing the union.

Several delegates declined to speak with The Detroit News on the divestment vote following the convention's adjournment. Chuck Snyder, 50, of Delaware, Ohio, an alternate delegate from Local 1588 who didn't vote on the resolution said he wasn't pleased to see the vote pass. Although he supports the spirit of the resolution in criticizing the conflict, he felt the way the particular resolution approached the matter wasn't the right action to take now.

"I think it is going to end up costing us more than people think," he said, based on information provided by the Secretary-Treasurer's office on the resolution.

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The union has a long history connected to human rights movements, though some believe the increasing influence of public-sector workers like graduate students are moving the union in a more radical direction. In late 2023, the IEB issued a statement demanding an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza. It was the largest U.S. union to do so at the time. It also formed a Divestment and Just Transition working group to study the history of Israel and Palestine and the union's economic ties to the conflict.

"The UAW has a sizeable faction of members that support the Palestinian cause, and they have great concerns about the course of United States policy in regard to supporting Israel," said Marick Masters, a management professor emeritus of Wayne State University. "This is a reflection of those sentiments, and this reflects a changing focus of the membership to a new direction that is reflective of the national mood and declining support of Israel and rising support for Palestinians."

He added that the UAW is based in Detroit, whose suburbs include a large Muslim, Arab and Middle Eastern population.

Five UAW locals supported the divestment resolution to bring it to the constitutional convention. The IEB didn't put it on the agenda, but delegates supported the motion by Karounos, a UAWD member and

seven-year UAW member, to bring the resolution out of committee. Debate happened on Thursday, followed by the vote.

"It felt so overwhelming and amazing, but it also was so reaffirming that the United Auto Workers is actually a union that stands for progressive, militant, rank-and-file action and protecting the most vulnerable among us," said Karounos, whose family is Greek Orthodox. She said the 2023 airstrike of Church of Saint Porphyrius in Gaza City especially resonated with her. "We vote with our dollars, and we just voted not to support our dollars going to genocide."

She added that in light of the union voting this week to increase its Strike and Defense Fund to \$1.3 billion, \$400,000 is a drop in the bucket.

Similar divestment demands were made by the UAW Arab Workers Caucus in the 1970s. Mike Davis, 44, of Fostoria, Ohio, on Wednesday called for a vote on a resolution that would've gone farther, including supporting workers who strike to interrupt weapons flows to Israel, set endorsement criteria for politicians and cut ties with Histadrut. The motion, however, fell short of the votes required.

Nonetheless, Davis, a UAW member and 13-year UAW member, was glad to see the passage of the Israel Bonds divestment: "It's been three years, and there's been no credible action by the executive board," he said. "The thousands of dollars we lose is not worth the lives lost in Gaza."

A UAW supporter also successfully called from committee an amendment that would trigger membership meetings to discuss striking in the event of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement activity in their area. That amendment, however, was voted down on Thursday.

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