Written Statement by Aaron Belk
before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation
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My name is Aaron Belk. I am a member of Teamsters Local 667 in Memphis, Tennessee. I live in Walls, Mississippi with my wife Becky and our two sons Chance and Dustin.

I have been a Teamster for 20 years. I worked 13 1/2 years for Jones Truck Lines as a dock worker and a fork lift driver at their Memphis terminal. In 1985 I was elected Head Job Steward and became more active in teamster union politics.

As a result of the U. S. Department of Justice entering into a consent decree with the Teamsters in 1989, the members of the union were given the freedom to elect their International officers in 1991. The entire process was supervised by the government to ensure a fair and democratic election. This was an historic first-ever opportunity for Teamster members to vote. It was also the first time in the history of the Teamsters union that persons seeking office, at the International level, had to do so through a membership vote. In the past, they were 'selected' with no real input from the membership.

Teamster members having the right to participate in an election, to decide who would serve in the top officer positions, was not welcomed by most officers. And many members who got involved in the election process were terminated, blackballed, beaten or worse. But it was the 'not to be denied' determination of those members, who did suffer and sacrifice through those oppressions, that marked the way for others to participate in this newly won right to campaign, and the freedom to vote in a democratic election. I am confident that the members of the Teamsters will never be shackled and silenced as we were before the elections of 1991.

I ran against the officers of my local union in Memphis on a rank and file slate. We were elected by our local membership to be delegates to the 1991 Teamsters Convention. At this convention I was nominated for one of the Southern Region Vice President positions. I was elected to that position along with the entire Ron Carey Slate. I was asked to come to Washington D.C. to help work on the transition team following the certification of the election results and the resolve of all protests. The transition turned out to be a grueling experience because the officers who lost the election left many things drifting following the news that the entire Ron Carey Slate had won the election. It took almost six months to untangle what they had left undone. Many left without listing pending litigation, grievances and other problems. Boxes and boxes of mail were left opened, but unanswered. It was the first sign of non-cooperation from those leaders, and

others, that was to become the normal relationship of doing business with those who did not win the membership's vote to lead the union.

Ron Carey was elected by the Teamster members. But once he was elected he had to operate in an arena with the Officers of the union who were against him three-to-one. Carey was disappointed because most Teamster Officers, who did not support the General President in the election, that were asked to accept appointed positions would not accept them. They withheld their knowledge and skills for political reasons, and then attacked Carey for hiring others in these positions. Ron Carey's opponents did everything they could to undermine every program and every meeting Ron Carey attended during those first months that followed the election. Ron Carey never had a day as General President of the Teamsters Union when he was afforded the respect the position deserves. He was elected by the members, and most Officers could not accept that fact. He is and will always be one of America's greatest heroes in my book, and the best General President the Teamsters union has ever had.

In October of 1992, I was appointed Administrator of the Ethical Practices Committee (EPC). I handled that responsibility until early 1995. The EPC was created by Ron Carey and the General Executive board to help rid the union of corruption. While serving as Administrator of the EPC, I received and investigated over 1200 complaints and cases. Ron Carey imposed 65 trusteeships during this time to correct financial, corrupt, or democratic procedures that posed imminent danger to the local unions and to the membership.

I took the job as Administrator of the EPC very seriously. I know if you were to contact those I dealt with during those years, most would tell you that I was very rigid in enforcing the EPC rules and very fair in reviewing complaints and investigating cases. There were some who wanted to use the EPC for their own political benefit, but that did not happen while I was Administrator.

In January of 1994 I was appointed Executive Assistant to the General President. I held daily conference calls to answer problems and give direction to the General President's team of representatives, that were sent in to seize the conference offices, following the revocation of the charters of the four U. S. conferences. I developed the field operation system that is currently in place which merged the conference structure with the International's Division structure. I oversaw the day to day operations of the IBT building as well as approved requests from Division and Department Directors for expenditures and projects that would exceed $500. All requests for outside meetings, travel, printing, contributions, hiring of employees, and a host of other papers came through my office for review and sign-off before payment could be made.

I also directed the activities of the teamster Community Services Department in conjunction with the American Red Cross and other groups during national disasters such as Hurricane Andrew, the Midwest flooding, the California earthquake, the Oklahoma City bombing, and the floods in Washington state and the Dakotas, just to name a few.

Teamsters have also been active helping Habitat for Humanity build houses for families in the Washington D.C. area as well as in other cities across the nation. It is unfortunate that all these good deeds done by millions of teamster members and their families are overshadowed by the misdeeds of a few.

Ron Carey encouraged me to make decisions and I did. There were times when I turned down requests that would be resubmitted directly to the General President for his consideration. There were times when he disagreed with some of my denials as well as some of my approvals; but those disagreements did not happen very often. Directors' 'going around' my office was difficult at times to deal with, but that was Ron Carey's management style. I really never got used to that, and some directors got to where they would submit their requests directly to the General President if they thought I would turn down their request.

I am proud that I turned down the extremely large contribution requests, which were later approved by others, that eventually resulted in the overturn and rerun of the 1996 election. Ron Carey put me in the Executive Assistant position to stop those types of things from happening. I think I did my job by holding and turning down these requests in the absence of the General President. My denial and concerns should have caused the IBT's General council to advise Tom Sever to submit the matters in question to the General Executive board. Article VII , section 2(b) states: ["in the event of a disagreement between the General President and the General Secretary/Treasurer concerning the making of any payment, the matter shall be submitted to the General Executive Board for determination, which determination shall be final and binding."] Why Judy Scott, who was the IBT General Council at that time, did not make that decision to advise the General Secretary/Treasurer accordingly is beyond me. And why Tom Sever or anyone else would agree to cut a check for $475,000 to Citizens Action, without the General Executive Board being polled for consideration and approval, is also a mystery.

Because I would not and did not approve those requests, others did. The result was the overturn of the 1996 Teamster election and the numerous investigations that are currently ongoing...including this one. I have been ostracized by most of the IBT leadership because I have told the truth and because I refuse to run on any of the current slates in the rerun election. But I can hold my head high and I can look at myself in the mirror each morning knowing that I did my job to the best of my ability by turning down these large contribution requests, and by refusing to support and condone the actions of the 1996 Carey campaign staff and their consultants.

When I took the oath of office to serve the members of the Teamsters union, part of that oath was "to eliminate corruption". To me that means all corruption committed by any Teamster member or employee, whomever and wherever it appears, regardless of which side of the political isle it lurks. And I will continue to uphold that oath and those principals for myself and for the members whom I serve.