

## Union Body Count And Big Spending

April 21, 2017 | | [Unions And Union Membership](#), [Labor And Employment](#)



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Last year, some of the country's biggest unions continue to hemorrhage membership, while others spent big dollars on organizing for modest gains in membership. In 2016, the union membership body count was not insignificant. According to LM-2 filings:

- Steelworkers lost 20,000 members
- United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) lost nearly 14,000 members
- Teamsters lost almost 5,800 members
- Machinists lost nearly 5,500 members

This continues a trend seen over the last decades. The repeated losses also are consistent with the findings of the federal government's Bureau of Labor Statistics, which show that public sector and private industry union membership declined by nearly 120,000 members. These are large numbers; especially considering that each lost member signals a further loss in union dues revenue. The news of course isn't all bad. Other large unions did grow, but only modestly. For example, the United Automobile Workers (UAW) showed growth of 7,324 members. News reports and the UAW's LM-2 shows it targeted large universities to help find new members, an area that became even more fertile after the NLRB's Aug. 22, 2016, decision that graduate students working as teaching or research assistants at private universities are [employees under the National Labor Relations Act \(NLRA\) and can be organized](#). Forays into these sometimes foreign organizing territories (yes, the UAW representing professors and college research assistants may make for strange bed fellows) have not been without cost. For example, the UAW LM-2 shows it spent \$704,967 on organizing Barnard College professors and invested another \$294,551 for public relations help organizing the grad students at Columbia University. Unions also continued big spending to push political agendas. The largest unions' LM-2s show that unions spent between \$3.7 million (the Machinists) and \$61 million (Service Employees International Union) on 2016 political activities, mostly in support of Democrats, Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign or progressive issues. Despite such spending, other data and anecdotal evidence shows there was strong support for now-President Trump among union members. This may demonstrate a further gap between union members and the organizations they pay dues for representing them. In fact, an August 2016 Rasmussen poll showed that union leaders are generally viewed as out of touch with members. What impact this trend may have remains to be seen.