

# **USW Cites Op-Ed on Oil Refinery Safety by Former Texas Judge Who Handled BP Texas City Explosion Litigation**

## ***Column Alleges Oil Companies Value Profits over Worker Safety***

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GALVESTON, Texas (March 2, 2015) — The United Steelworkers (USW) union today said a newspaper column by former Texas District Judge Susan Criss strengthens the arguments the union has made throughout its one-month Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) strike in the oil industry.

“Why would a company refuse to guarantee workers the right to a safe workplace? Because the lives and safety of their workers do not matter enough to cut into profits,” Criss wrote in a recent column for the Galveston County Daily News. “Because the people that do the work generating those profits do not matter.”

The argument that oil companies are prioritizing profits over the safety of workers has been the central focus of the USW’s ULP strike that began at nine facilities on Feb. 1 and now includes nearly 7,000 workers at 15 locations. Royal Dutch Shell is leading negotiations on behalf of the companies.

“Why are the union members not backing down? Overtime dollars pay a lot of bills and then some. Striking means bills go unpaid,” Criss wrote. “Why not take the money and take their chances? Because they cannot forget the cost of working in dangerous conditions.”

As a judge, Criss presided over 4,016 legal claims arising from a March 2005 explosion at the BP refinery in Texas City, Texas, that killed 15 workers and injured 180.

Investigations into that disaster “revealed a culture of complacency toward worker safety at that refinery contributed to the disaster,” Criss wrote. “Worker fatigue resulting from excessive overtime hours was another problem cited.”