

Unifor Auto Council determines bargaining priorities for D3 negotiations



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LONDON—Pensions, wages, transition plans as autoworkers shift to producing electric vehicles, and confirmation of new investment and product lines emerged as the bargaining priorities at the Unifor Special Auto Council, as the union prepares for upcoming negotiations with the Detroit Three automakers (Ford, General Motors and Stellantis).

“This is going to be a big year. One of the most closely watched and highly anticipated rounds of Detroit Three bargaining that we’ve seen in a long time,” said Lana Payne, Unifor National President. “The Auto Council has worked to identify our key, overarching priorities amid hundreds of specific proposals put forward by our members to set our strategic course. Our members expect us to deliver and they deserve it.”

During Special Auto Council, delegates raised concerns including rising inflation, income security during retooling for EV production, hiring and retention challenges including for Skilled Trades and the unionization of new EV facilities, among others.

Contract negotiations for the union’s 20,000 auto sector members at the D3 will get underway in August 2023. The Unifor collective agreement covers members working at auto assembly plants, powertrain facilities, casting and stamping operations, parts distribution centres, office and clerical workers, as well as fire and security units.

Unifor's Special Auto Council, held May 17-18 in London, Ont., brought together active and retired members from Ford, GM and Stellantis to prioritize the demands that will be brought to the table. Analysis of the sector's economic forecast, current Canadian manufacturing footprint, and member pension plans informed the conversation.

"Inclusion is very important when it comes to bargaining," said John D'Agnolo, Unifor Auto Council Chair and Ford Master Bargaining Chair. "Our bargaining process includes members from the beginning and at the end they get to vote on it, so throughout the whole process they get to see it. It's the democratic way."

Unifor has not yet announced which company it will select to set the contract pattern for the remaining rounds of bargaining with the other companies.

"We are in an extraordinary time in the sector, with thousands of members bracing for a transition to electric vehicles," said James Stewart, Stellantis Master Bargaining Chair. "One of our primary priorities in addition to pensions and wages will be to secure details of these investment commitments including specific product allocation, transition timeline and income security protections during the transition."

As workers face rising interest rates and record inflation, pensions and wages are top of mind for members.

"It is important that auto manufacturing jobs continue to be family and community supporting jobs, with solid, stable pensions and strong wages," said Jason Gale, GM Master Bargaining Chair. "Our members have been very clear with us that pensions and wage improvements form the core of our bargaining proposals."

Unifor previously unveiled its set of 29 recommendations for governments and automakers in its [auto policy document, Navigating the Road Ahead: Rebuilding Canada's powerhouse auto sector](#).

"We are the ones most vested in this industry's success. We are its most vocal advocate and its strongest champion," said Payne. "One thing is for certain with our union: once we decide on a goal, we don't waver. We are relentless and determined."