

Unifor picks Ford for pattern negotiations in 2023 auto talks

Pensions, wage improvements, investments, supports for EV transition main priorities

Dale Molnar ·

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Unifor president Lana Payne says Ford Motor Company of Canada Ltd. has been chosen as the target for negotiations as the union looks to work out new contracts for autoworkers. (CBC News)

Unifor has chosen the Ford Motor Company of Canada Ltd. as the target for negotiations as the union looks to work out new contracts for autoworkers.

"I was encouraged by Ford Motor Company's transparency with our union on product programs and business plans," Unifor president Lana Payne said during a news conference in Toronto on Tuesday afternoon.

Three automakers — Ford, Stellantis and General Motors — engage in pattern bargaining, where a deal with the target company will set the template for agreements with other two.

Across the three companies, Unifor represents more than 19,600 autoworkers.

Payne suggested on Aug. 10 at the kickoff of talks that Ford would likely be the choice because of co-operation Ford had already shown. She said progress has already been made at the subcommittee levels since talks began in earnest on Aug. 22.

Payne repeated four main priorities for the union during these negotiations: pensions, wage improvements, investments and supports for the transition to producing electric vehicles.

Bargaining comes this time while the United Auto Workers (UAW) is also negotiating deals in the U.S. and analysts are predicting strikes at all Detroit Three automakers.

Tallying the costs of striking

Patrick Anderson, chief executive officer of Anderson Economic Group, a consulting firm that does work in the auto industry, predicts a 10-day strike at all three of the Detroit automakers would cost the companies and workers \$5.6 billion US.

He said it would also affect Canada.

"It's a serious interest to people who are in Ontario and Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, and it is something that won't stay on one side of the border," said Anderson.

Over the weekend, autoworkers in Ontario voted 99 per cent in favour of striking.

Unifor bargaining teams for GM and Stellantis will now go home, while the Ford bargaining team, chaired by Local 200 president John D'Agnolo, will continue talks in Toronto.

D'Agnolo was pleased with the announcement and said he will collaborate with Stellantis chair James Stewart and GM chair Jason Gale every day during the negotiations.

Both Gale and Stewart offered their support and congratulations to the Ford committee.

"I'm looking forward to it. We have a great team led by Lana and the national staff ... and I can't wait to get at it," said D'Agnolo.

The strike deadline is Sept.18.