CAW Workers At GM-Suzuki Plant OK Contract

NEW YORK (AP) — Nearly two-thirds of union workers at a Canadian auto plant jointly owned by General Motors and Suzuki have approved a new contract that would freeze wages and pensions, trim benefits, introduce a monthly health care contribution and reduce break times.

However, the new contract at the CAMI Automotive Inc. assembly plant puts base wages on par with General Motors for the first time ever. The agreement also provides for the production of a new model to replace the Chevrolet Equinox and the GMC Terrain in 2014, a crucial element, Canadian Auto Workers President Ken Lewenza said in a statement Sunday.

"While these contract changes are difficult for our members, I hope they will help usher in a decade of prosperity for the CAMI facility, which will guarantee good jobs well into the future," Lewenza said.

Canadian Auto Workers Local 88 members approved changes that make their new three-year agreement similar to those reached at both Chrysler and General Motors earlier this spring. Much of the agreement will be effective in September 2010, when the existing contract expires.

CAMI is a joint venture between Suzuki Motor Corp. and General Motors of Canada Ltd. established to provide GM an opportunity to offer economy cars and to give Suzuki access to the North American market. CAW Local 88 represents 2,400 hourly workers at the Ingersoll, Ontario, plant, which makes the Chevrolet Equinox and GMC Terrain.

"Our members recognized the importance of long-term stability, and although no one wanted these contract changes, I believe stability is what we achieved with this new agreement," said Mike Van Boekel, CAMI chairman.

The union said it remains in negotiations with Ford Motor Co.

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