

UAW, GM Agreement May Be Near

Tom Krisher, AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — It looks like the United Auto Workers union and General Motors Co. are nearing an agreement on a new contract.

UAW Vice President Joe Ashton, the union's chief negotiator, told workers in an email update Friday that bargainers are getting "very close" to the framework of a deal.

"I am optimistic that the negotiations process is entering its final stage," Ashton wrote. "I truly believe that a settlement is within reach."

But Ashton also cautioned that both sides still need to do more work, saying that agreements of this size undergo many revisions before they are final.

Contract talks between the union and GM, Chrysler Group LLC and Ford Motor Co. began in July and will determine wages and benefits for factory workers at all three companies. They will also set the bar for wages at auto parts companies, U.S. factories run by foreign automakers and other manufacturers, which employ hundreds of thousands of people. The talks are the first since GM and Chrysler needed government aid to make it through bankruptcy protection in 2009.

Workers at all three companies have stayed on the job under terms of a contract that expired Wednesday night. Workers at GM and Chrysler cannot strike over wages under the terms of the companies' 2009 government bailouts. Ford workers can still strike. Each company negotiates with the union separately.

Negotiators with GM and the union bargained until around 9 p.m. Thursday and resumed talks on Friday morning.

"We continue to make progress in negotiations," GM spokeswoman Kim Carpenter said, declining further comment.

The union is seeking bigger profit-sharing checks, guarantees of more jobs, signing bonuses and raises for entry-level workers. Ford and GM want to cut their hourly labor costs, which still are higher than Asian automakers with U.S. factories. Chrysler is trying to hold its costs steady.

Talks with Chrysler and Ford also are continuing, but have slowed as the union concentrates on GM. Any deal with GM would be used as a template for the other two companies, although unlike past years, there will be differences to match each company's finances.

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