

Majority Of Ford Workers Supporting New Contract

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DETROIT (AP) — Workers at some of Ford Motor Co.'s largest local unions have approved a new labor contract with the company, making it likely that the four-year deal will be approved when voting finishes on Tuesday.

The United Auto Workers union said Sunday night that more than 90 percent of the 2,991 workers voting at the Kansas City Assembly Plant in Claycomo, Mo., voted in favor of the agreement. Workers there make the Ford Escape small SUV and the F-Series truck. The agreement also promises \$1 billion in investments at the plant and new products, including a commercial van now produced in Europe.

Earlier Sunday, 62 percent of the 5,282 workers voting at Local 600 in Dearborn, Mich., favored the agreement. Workers at the local — which is Ford's largest — mainly make the F-Series pickup truck. Dearborn, just outside Detroit, is also the home of Ford's headquarters.

The Dearborn local's vote was a particularly important one, since it was unclear if workers would support it. The local has been a hotbed of dissent in the past. In 2009, the local led an uprising that killed a second round of concessions to Ford meant to help the company through tough financial times.

The Sunday votes brought the overall vote count to 62 percent in favor and 38 percent against, with only a few large locals left to vote, the UAW said. The tally means that the remaining plants would have to vote overwhelmingly against the deal for it to fail.

Ford and the UAW reached a tentative agreement on the contract Oct. 4, but it must be ratified by the company's 41,000 union workers.

UAW President Bob King has expressed confidence the agreement would pass, despite some dissent at other local unions.

Under the Ford contract agreement, most workers will get profit-sharing checks instead of annual raises. Workers also would get a \$6,000 signing bonus and the promise of thousands of new jobs in U.S. plants through 2015.

The agreement is more generous than the new contract for General Motors Co. workers, who approved their deal last month by a wide margin. Chrysler Group LLC and the UAW reached a deal last week that isn't as rich as the ones signed at Ford and GM. Workers at Chrysler, which lost money during the first half of the year, are voting this week.

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Still, passage of the Ford contract was in doubt as recently as Friday, when the UAW Ford Department reported on its Facebook page that the deal was being voted down by a slim margin. Then, workers at assembly and parts stamping operations in Chicago voted against the contract.

But late Friday and during the weekend, several other plants, including one that makes the Mustang in Flat Rock, Mich., south of Detroit, and an engine complex in Cleveland, voted in favor, and the vote tipped toward passage.

Union locals at two assembly plants in the Louisville, Ky., area have yet to vote. But the factories will get additional investment and work from the deal, so they are likely to approve the pact.

A simple majority of voting members is needed for the contract's adoption at Ford and Chrysler.

Workers who opposed the Ford deal were angry that the contract doesn't give back some of the things they lost in previous agreements, including annual raises, cost-of-living increases and additional holidays. They also were mad about Ford CEO Alan Mulally's \$26.5 million pay package for 2010.

Ford has said it is optimistic the deal will pass because it's fair to employees and improves the company's competitiveness in the U.S.

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