

## GM-UAW Talks Reach Critical Point

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DETROIT -- Thousands of hourly workers at [General Motors Corp.](#) faced an uncertain Monday as contract talks continued into the early morning without an agreement.

Bargaining started at 11 a.m. EDT Sunday with several local United Auto Workers leaders saying they had been told progress had been made over the weekend. But the leaders, some of whom requested anonymity because the talks are private, said they were told to prepare for a strike if the talks broke off.



United Auto Workers Local 22 President George McGregor wait words from United Auto Workers leadership on new contract talks Saturday, Sept. 15, 2007, in Detroit. General Motors Corp. and the United Auto Workers made progress at the bargaining table Saturday but still faced significant hurdles and weren't expected to hammer out a new contract until later in the weekend. (AP Photo/Maurice Harris) (Maurice Harris - AP)

A UAW local in Arlington, Texas, told its members to report to work as scheduled Monday but said it was committed to a strike if necessary. In a joint statement sent to union members and the media, Local 276 leaders told members they expected negotiators either to wrap up talks or declare an impasse at the end of Sunday's negotiating session.

"We understand the issues are complex and the effects far-reaching," local president Enrique Flores Jr. and shop chairman Dwayne Humphries said in the statement. "Solutions are certainly proving to be difficult."

A message on a hotline at UAW Local 22 in Flint also told workers to report to work as scheduled Monday. The message told workers to ignore sign-up sheets for strike duty, a sign that a walkout wasn't imminent.

But at a Sunday afternoon meeting, UAW Local 735 President Chuck Rogers told workers at a GM transmission complex near Ypsilanti that he was told by one of the negotiators that there would be a strike if no agreement was reached Sunday.

Two other local leaders also said they were told to expect a strike if no agreement was reached Sunday.

Negotiations were continuing early Monday morning, said GM spokesman Dan Flores.

Rogers told Local 735 members that the UAW came within minutes of striking Friday night when President Ron Gettelfinger walked out of a bargaining room after getting into a dispute with GM negotiators. But GM Chief Financial Officer Fritz Henderson intervened and brought Gettelfinger back to the bargaining table, and progress has been made since then, Rogers said.

GM's contract with the UAW was to expire at midnight Friday, but the union extended it on an hour-by-hour basis. The strike threat loomed until early Saturday, when negotiators told local leaders to stand down.

Strike talk often is heard when negotiations get close to or pass the contract expiration deadline.

"I heard things are moving kind of in the right direction," Dave Green, president of one of two locals at the Lordstown, Ohio, plant that makes small cars for Chevrolet and Pontiac, said Sunday. "We let our folks know a strike is not out of the question," he said, adding that he hoped for a resolution.

Bargainers worked all day Saturday. GM spokeswoman Katie McBride said progress was made but said several tough issues remained, declining comment on specifics.

UAW spokesman Roger Kerson did not return a call for comment late Sunday.

Only two GM assembly plants \_ in Flint and Lansing \_ were scheduled to operate Sunday, and McBride said those plants ran as scheduled. GM has about 73,000 UAW-represented hourly workers at its U.S. factories.

One of the local union leaders who asked not to be identified said the main outstanding issues were retiree health care expenses and whether GM would promise to build new vehicles at UAW-represented factories. GM wants the union to take over responsibility for retiree health care costs using a company-funded trust. The UAW was asking for job guarantees in exchange for taking on the costs.

GM, [Ford Motor Co.](#) and Chrysler LLC have a combined unfunded retiree health care obligation of more than \$90 billion. GM's unfunded obligation alone is \$51 billion.

The local official said he was told Sunday that bargainers had moved closer on funding the health care trust, but were still apart on job security guarantees for factories.

The union named GM as the lead company and potential strike target Thursday, then extended contracts with Ford and Chrysler that can be ended by either party with three days' notice. Once the union reaches an agreement with GM, it will pursue similar deals at Ford and Chrysler.