

# Ford Executive Chair Bill Ford calls on autoworkers to end strike, says company's future is at stake

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Ford Motor Co., executive chairman Bill Ford is seen during an announcement, Feb. 13, 2023, in Romulus, Mich. Ford is scheduled to make a rare speech Monday morning, Oct. 16, 2023 about the future of American manufacturing with the company near an impasse with striking autoworkers. The speech near the company's huge pickup truck plant in the company's hometown of Dearborn, Michigan, is expected to address the monthlong strike by members of the United

Auto Workers union. Credit: AP Photo/Carlos Osorio, file

Ford Motor Co. Executive Chairman Bill Ford called on autoworkers to come together to end a monthlong strike that he says could cost the company the ability to invest in the future.

In a rare speech during contract talks in the company's hometown of Dearborn, Michigan, Ford said high labor costs could limit spending to develop new vehicles and invest in factories. "It's the absolute lifeblood of our company. And if we lose it, we will lose to the competition. America loses. Many jobs will be lost," said the great grandson of company founder Henry Ford.

The company, he said, builds more vehicles in America and has more United Auto Workers employees than any company, which has increased its costs in a highly competitive industry.

Ford has 57,000 UAW workers compared with 46,000 at GM and 43,000 at Stellantis. "Many of our competitors moved jobs to Mexico as we added jobs here in the U.S.," Ford said.

The company is near an impasse with the United Auto Workers union, which walked out in targeted strikes at all three Detroit automakers on Sept. 15,

Last week 8,700 union members walked out at the largest and most profitable Ford plant in the world, the Kentucky Truck Plant in Louisville.

Ford said the strike at the Kentucky plant is harming tens of thousands of Americans who work for parts suppliers and Ford dealers. The strike

also could cause a fragile parts supply base to collapse, he said. "If it continues, it will have a major impact on the American economy and devastate local communities," he said.

There was no response from the UAW on Monday when The Associated Press sought comment.

Bill Ford, only the fourth family member to lead the 120-year-old company, said he has watched other countries lose their auto industries, then all of their manufacturing base. He said strong American manufacturing is essential for national security.

"We need to come together to bring an end to this acrimonious round of talks," Ford said. "I still believe in a bright future—one that we can build together. I still believe the automobile industry is a major force for good in our country. We will continue to be there when America needs us most."

Last week, after the Kentucky strike began, a top Ford executive said on a conference call with reporters that Ford had reached the limit in how much it was willing to spend to end the strike.

At the Ford Michigan Assembly Plant in Wayne west of Detroit, few workers are on the picket lines Monday afternoon said they listened to Ford's speech.

When told what Ford said about investing in the future, line worker Steve Applebee said he agreed. "I get that," he said. "I can see both sides."

But he also said Ford is paying CEO Jim Farley \$21 million per year when starting pay for Ford factory workers is up only about \$3 per hour from when he started with the company 31 years ago.

Ford's offer of a 23% general wage increase barely covers inflation over the last three or four years, said Applebee, 59.

Carlos Hollins 47, of Detroit, who just started with Ford in July and is at the low end of the pay scale, said workers gave up raises in 2008 when Ford and the others were in financial trouble. They were promised that concessions would be restored when the company recovered.

"We shouldn't have to suffer, especially for the retirees," he said. "they need to pay us what we deserve."

The union has said retirees haven't received a pension increase for at least a decade.

Hollis says workers should get everything they are asking for, and Ford has enough money to pay it.

The speech from Ford arrives with the entire auto industry making a historic and expensive shift from internal combustion engines to electric vehicles.

UAW President Shawn Fain has said Ford and crosstown rivals General Motors and Jeep maker Stellantis are making billions in profits, and that workers should get a share. He says the workers should be repaid for sacrificing general pay raises, cost of living adjustments and agreeing to lower wage tiers to keep the companies afloat during the Great Recession.

The union began striking at targeted factories after its contracts with the companies expired. It started picketing one assembly plant from each company, but that has since spread to 38 parts warehouses at GM and Jeep maker Stellantis. The UAW later added another assembly plant at both GM and Ford and on Wednesday, Fain made the surprise

announcement that the union would walk out at the Kentucky plant, which makes Super Duty pickups and large Ford and Lincoln SUVs.

About 34,000 of the union's 146,000 employees at all three automakers are now on strike.

The seemingly widening labor rift suggests Ford and the union may be in for a lengthy strike that could cost the company and its workers billions of dollars.

The union has said Ford's general wage offer is up to 23% over four years and that it has reinstated cost of living raises. GM and Stellantis were at 20%. But Fain said none was high enough.

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