

## UAW seeks voluntary abortion coverage

Union may not win approval this year, labor experts say

By DAVID KILEY  
USA TODAY

DETROIT — The United Auto Workers union is asking automakers and parts suppliers to extend health-care benefits to cover voluntary abortion.

The outcome of negotiations will help set the agenda for smaller unions, many of which do not have the coverage and use the UAW contract as a benchmark.

The union's request already has stirred protest. Citizens for a Pro-Life Society plans to demonstrate at UAW headquarters in Detroit.

Abortion-rights supporters, though, praised the union's step. "It's a very significant move that the UAW is taking up the issue, and it reflects thinking that reproductive health care for women is not a luxury, it's basic health care," said Kate Michelman, president of NARAL Pro-Choice America.

The UAW wouldn't comment on the proposal.

Labor experts question whether the union will get the benefit in current contract talks, but say seeking it now would make it easier to win next time, as well as to win coverage of prescription birth-control measures from General Motors, the one automaker not providing it.

"Unions raise issues knowing they may take a few contract negotiations to get. ... Dental and eye coverage weren't won the first time," said Ann Wendt, associate professor of management at Wright State University. The current UAW contract expires next month.

Abortion and birth-control coverage are growing in importance.

UAW members include 169,000 women, about 25 percent of the active membership. Women are presidents of 130 of 959 UAW locals.

Roughly two-thirds of new union members are women, according to union reports on file at Wayne State University. Women are nearly 43 percent of union members in the United States, up from 41 percent in 2000 and 37 percent in 1990.

Abortion coverage is not unusual: Michigan public employees have it, for instance. "Insurance companies often cover it under vague language so as not to invite controversy," said employee benefits consultant Simon Winkler.