

STRIKE!

My state's a mess: we still have no budget, and today the UAW launched its biggest strike in 30 years. (At least the football world is back to normal, with UM beating JoePa and the Lions losing badly).

A lot of people bitch and moan about bad American cars and use that as an excuse to bitch about UAW. But that ignores two things. First, those UAW guys don't get to design the cars. I've heard as much enthusiasm among UAW workers as I have Ann Arbor yuppies about Priuses—though the UAW members were just wishing their manufacturer was the one making the Prius. And second, this strike is really about whether or not working people in this country get healthcare. For all their bad car designs, American car companies are really getting pounded in this day and age through legacy costs—the health care and pension for the men and women who made the car you learned to drive on (for me it was a Pontiac Grand Prix with way too much power for a 16-year old). By the time the manufacturers have paid the legacy costs that, in the case of many of their competitors, are paid by some foreign government, they're already thousands of dollars behind per vehicle. That has a dramatic influence on the kinds of investments a car company can make in innovative new technologies and cool bells and whistles. And simple things like manufacturing and operating efficiencies.

The UAW and GM are negotiating union-provided health care. But the real solution to the demise of union manufacturing would be universal healthcare. Give the Big Three that, and they're going to have some room to make changes in energy efficiency that we all know they need.

For now, the UAW is striking to preserve the principle that our working men and women should get healthcare. But going forward, it is high time our country picked up the burden from the striking autoworkers.