

# Burrelle's

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The Associated Press

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DETROIT (AP) -- A Washington-based group has filed lawsuits against the United Auto Workers, claiming that recruiting agreements between it and major auto suppliers are forcing workers to join the union against their will.

The agreements have been a boon to the union, which has struggled to boost its membership in recent years.

As a result of the deals, the UAW has the right to openly recruit workers at companies such as Magna International, Johnson Controls Inc. and Dana Corp.

But the National Right to Work Foundation claims the agreements amount to an illegal scheme to force workers into the union. The Detroit News reported in a Wednesday story.

"People like the UAW used to fight against company unions, but now they've become the company union," said Stefan Gleason, vice president of the nonprofit National Right to Work foundation. "The choice to join or not join has been taken away from employees."

Gleason's group is using its \$6 million annual budget to back up that argument. Every time UAW officials announce a major recruiting victory for the union at a supplier, the group challenges it in court.

"The Right to Work Foundation has tried repeatedly to overturn union recognition agreements. They have failed repeatedly," said UAW President Ron Gettelfinger in response to the latest challenge against a union agreement at Dana Corp. "The charges filed are without merit."

Indeed, the foundation's Legal Defense Fund has been rebuffed at nearly every turn, losing most of its battles against the nation's strongest labor unions.

But the most recent challenges -- which involve an untested area of the National Right to Work Act -- have the potential to unravel recent UAW wins if the foundation can prove companies have cooperated with the union too closely, analysts say.

"There's some merit to their argument, but it depends on how blatant the union was in pressuring the company to give its employees up," said labor attorney Maurice Jenkins, of the Dickinson Wright law firm in Detroit.

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The National Labor Relations Board ultimately will decide, on a ~~case-by-case~~ basis, if the deals are legal.

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