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## Fight Over Car Insurance Laws Ends up in Court

By TIM MARTIN  
Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — A coalition fighting proposed changes to Michigan's auto insurance laws filed a lawsuit Monday seeking claims information from an association that handles medical bills for seriously injured accident victims.

The suit filed in Ingham County by the Coalition Protecting Auto No-Fault comes after the Michigan Catastrophic Claims Association from the state's Freedom of Information Act request, saying it isn't subject to the law.

The Coalition Protecting Auto No-Fault says information related to the cost of

claims and the age of claimants is needed for lawmakers to make informed decisions about proposed changes to state law. Bills pending in the Legislature would end Michigan's status as the only state that mandates uncapped medical benefit coverage for people seriously injured in auto accidents.

The coalition says that a 1988 state law exempting the Michigan Catastrophic Claims Association from the state's Freedom of Information Act is unconstitutional because it was done improperly.

The coalition says the law made changes in the state insurance code but not in the Freedom of Information law itself.

The Insurance Institute of Michigan says the catastrophic claims association is exempt from Freedom of Information law because it's a private entity, not a state agency. The insurance group says the money it collects comes from auto insurers and vehicle owners, not the state.

"The liability is with the companies individually," said Pete Kuhnmuensch, executive

director of the Insurance Institute of Michigan. "The state does not back up the MCCA."

The Coalition Protecting Auto No-Fault says the claims association, created by state law in the late 1970s, should be subject to more public scrutiny. The Coalition believes there hasn't been enough public discussion yet.

"It's the public's money and the public has a right to know all the facts about how their money is managed and whether what the public pays in premiums is adequate to handle future claims," coalition attorney George Sinas said.

The records fight is part of a broader battle about proposals in the Republican-led Michigan Legislature to change insurance laws.

All Michigan auto policyholders currently must buy unlimited medical benefits as part of their coverage.

Regular auto insurance policies handle coverage up to \$500,000, after which all insured motorists are assessed a fee — now at some \$145 per vehicle — to cover more severe cases reimbursed through the MCCA.

The association covers medical bills for roughly 12,800 accident victims across the state. All auto insurance companies operating in Michigan are required to be members.

Bills pending in the state Legislature would allow motorists to choose among various levels of personal injury protection coverage, rather than mandating uncapped coverage.

Supporters of the changes, including the auto insurance industry, say it would allow motorists to opt out of more expensive coverage they can't afford or don't want. Insurers also are looking for relief in a system they say is growing increasingly expensive and threatening their finances.

The Coalition Protecting Auto No-Fault includes hospital and health groups, trial lawyers and other organizations. The coalition says the proposed changes would not guarantee rate reductions. Critics of the plan to allow capped coverage also say motorists opting for less coverage could wind up underinsured and in financial trouble if they're seriously injured.

## Welding Society Hosts Feb. Event

The American Welding Society (AWS) - Detroit Section, will be hosting a dinner meeting on Feb. 9 at the Ukrainian Club in Warren. "Servo Welding Development and Application Problems" is the subject matter from speaker John Pippin, general manager of Milco Manufacturing.

To register to attend, contact Dave Kelly at 248-255-3608 or email him at dkel-

ly@fusionwelding.com. The schedule includes Welcome and Networking (5:30 p.m.); Opening Remarks and Dinner (6 p.m.); Patron Presentations (7 p.m.); Milco Servo Gun Presentation (7:15 p.m.); and adjournment is at about 8 p.m.

AWS says that their Ladies Night Dinner & Dance is scheduled for Henry Ford Museum on March 31.

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SCAN ME

## Ford White Collar Employees in Line To Receive Bonuses for 2011 Results

DEARBORN, Mich. (AP) — Ford Motor Co. is showing confidence in its turnaround and the U.S. economy by giving pay raises and bonuses to 20,000 white-collar workers mainly in the U.S. and Canada.

Workers got letters from President of the Americas Mark Fields last week saying they'll get 2.7 percent base pay increases on April 1. They'll also get bonuses this year based on their individual performances, spokeswoman Marcey Evans said.

Ford made \$6.6 billion in the first three quarters of last year. It will report fourth-quarter earnings later this month. The company's U.S. sales rose 11 percent last year. It has made a huge turnaround since 2006, when it lost \$12.6 billion and had to

borrow more than \$20 billion to stay in business.

Salaried workers didn't get pay raises last year, but many were granted performance bonuses. They got only merit pay in 2010 and no raises or bonuses were given in 2009, Evans said.

The raises are necessary to keep Ford's pay competitive with other Fortune 100 companies, Evans said. Each year, Ford studies pay at competitors and other companies, she said.

Ford also raised its matching contribution to the salaried employees' 401(k) retirement plan. The company now pays 60 cents for every dollar an employee contributes, up to 5 percent of their salary. This year the contribution will rise to 80

cents, Evans said.

She would not say how much the raises, bonuses and additional contributions will cost the company.

The raises rankled some United Auto Workers members because they did not get annual pay raises in a new four-year contract negotiated with the company last year. During the contract talks, the company told union negotiators that it didn't want to give raises to avoid recurring annual expenses.

But the workers got signing bonuses and lump-sum profit sharing payments that are worth at least \$16,700 over the four-year contract. Workers at General Motors Co. and Chrysler Group LLC agreed to similar contracts with payments smaller than those.

## Jeep Partners with George Lucas in Telling the Tuskegee Airmen Story

AUBURN HILLS — The Jeep brand is partnering with Lucasfilm as part of a sponsorship to support their latest feature film Red Tails.

The latest epic from producer George Lucas is inspired by the true story of America's first all-black aerial combat unit The Tuskegee Airmen. The film also highlights the important role Jeep vehicles played in World War II and is featured in multiple scenes, including two action scenes that take place inside a Jeep vehicle.

"We commend George Lucas and Lucasfilm in the quest to tell the story of the Tuskegee Airmen's courage, ability and resiliency seen in Red Tails," said Kim Adams House, Head of Jeep Advertising.

"It is a proud moment for the Jeep brand to reunite with the renowned and brave Tuskegee Airmen — who helped to keep the many missions in the air moving forward while Jeep vehicles kept our troops moving forward on land."

In 1941, leading up to America's involvement in World War II, the Army put out a call to automakers to build a fast, agile and versatile transport vehicle. The Jeep brand answered the call and produced more than 630,000 Jeep vehicles that were used by our military and allies.

"We are proud to have been a part of this historic depiction that illustrates the bravery of the Tuskegee Airmen. Red Tails is a movie that Jeep fans would appreciate as it also depicts the important role that Jeep vehicles played in the quest for freedom during World War II," said Adams House.

"The image of a classic Jeep instantly recalls the historic era of World War II," says Howard Roffman, President of Lucas Licensing. "Having the Jeep brand involved in the promotion of a movie that sets out to faithfully recreate 1944 and the inspiring story of the Tuskegee Airmen is a natural fit."

Leading up to opening

weekend the Jeep brand sponsored four premieres in Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles and the New York red carpet movie premiere where a 1944 Jeep vehicle shared the spotlight amongst the stars.

Built on 70 years of legendary heritage, Jeep is the authentic SUV with class-leading capability, craftsmanship and versatility.



Actor Terrence Howard is one of the stars of the new World War II movie "Red Tails," which chronicles the contributions of the Tuskegee Airmen. Jeep announced a marketing deal with the movie makers, led by George Lucas of "Star Wars" fame.