

# Let's clear the air — A bankrupt GM won't solve anything

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The following guest opinion by U.S. Rep. Joe Knollenberg is a rebuttal of New York Times Columnist Tom Friedman's harsh criticism of General Motors. The Times chose not to publish it saying it didn't fit its policy. It had to be 150 words or less and be received within seven days of the original column it was meant to refute. However, unlike the Times, we feel it's worth running in its entirety.)

America would not be better off if General Motors fell into bankruptcy. The fact that Tom Friedman has used The New York Times editorial page to cheerlead for the demise of one of the great American companies reflects just how scornful folks on the East Coast can be of those of us who reside in fly-over country.

GM, the world's largest automaker and a major cog in Michigan's economy, has done more to create an upwardly mobile middle class than

almost any other company in America. GM provides excellent jobs and benefits to tens of thousands of workers and helps support the employment of countless more when considering supplier jobs and other auto-related service industries.

In Friedman's eyes, GM is a corporate sinner because it makes trucks and SUVs that consume too much gasoline. But what really irks Friedman is the American people's love of roomy vehicles with torque behind them. Three of the top four selling vehicles in America are Detroit-made trucks. The popularity and profitability of pickups is why Toyota, the walk-on-water, favorite automaker of the elite chattering class, is itching to grab market share from Detroit with its muscular Tundra.

Friedman wants to adopt new fuel economy rules to save the American people from their own purchasing desires. Stop the Bubbas from buying those damn trucks is what Friedman is really saying.

While there is no disputing that America needs to reduce our dependence on Middle East oil, we can achieve this national security objective without raising federal fuel economy regulations to job-destroying levels or imposing a stiff gasoline tax increase on motorists. There are smarter ways to reduce our oil consumption.

We should make the tax credit for hybrids and other alternative fuel vehicles a permanent part of the tax code and increase its value to encourage more Americans to buy fuel-efficient vehicles. The tax code is a

powerful tool. It helped make America a nation of homeowners. It can help reduce our dependence on Middle East oil.

We need to ensure that ethanol is available at more gas stations in America so E-85 flex fuel vehicles can become viable. We need to step up investments in alternative fuel research at the federal level, especially in the area of battery technology so the promise of electric vehicles can become a reality.

I am particularly intrigued by the potential of clean diesel technology. As a world traveler, Friedman ought to know that Western Europeans rely heavily on diesel to power their cars. Diesel engines, which are 25 percent to 30 percent more fuel-efficient than traditional internal combustion engines, provide superior fuel efficiency in all driving conditions. Hybrids are great in city traffic, but their fuel savings decline precipitously on the highway.

America also needs to get serious

about expanding our use of nuclear power if we want to reduce CO2 emissions. France, a country that has been critical of the United States for not signing the Kyoto Protocol, relies on nuclear energy to generate more than 75 percent of its electricity. Nuclear energy emits zero greenhouse gases.

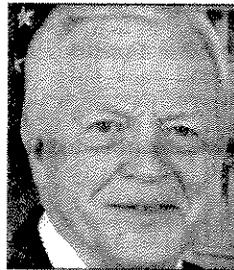
The professional environmental lobby in America and opinion shapers like Tom Friedman cannot have it both ways. If they want fewer carbon emissions, then they should be supportive of using technologies in America that are prevalent in "environmentally-conscious" Western Europe.

Slapping the domestic auto industry with stringent fuel economy requirements will penalize blue-collar working families and possibly drive them out of the middle class forever.

GM's bankruptcy would be a national tragedy, not something to celebrate.

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## GUEST OPINION



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