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Toyota tangled in Washington show trial

By Ron Hart

Congress dragged Toyota to Washington to testify in one of the indignant show trials they so love. I wish they would subpoena themselves and bring Congress before a Senate hearing, under oath and under the hot lights of TV cameras. Then we might get to the roots of most problems in America: too much government intervention, confusing rules, and second-guessing politicians.



Congress will say Toyota executives knew about a few brake problems and just "drug their feet" on the matter, which, coincidentally, is the new Prius owner's manual's suggested method of stopping the car.

It has been a tough year for Prius owners all the way around. The car they overpaid \$15,000 for has been recalled, it runs so quietly that it tends to run over people who do not hear it coming, and it turns out there is no global warming.

Toyota has also recalled that sanctimonious, smug look Prius drivers wear when they talk about how they are saving the earth, one trip to yoga class at a time! On the bright side, liberals are now victims, and they love that about as much.

In fact, this problem with electronic braking came about because of federal pressure through CAFE standards, forcing manufacturers to make lighter cars. As they often do, politicians point their fingers at Big Bad Business. Now a memo has come to light showing that Toyota cut a deal with its Washington regulators on the braking issue last year. As is often the case when politicians point fingers, at least three fingers are pointing right back at them.

To be fair, technology changes can be difficult. I remember when they changed the place they put the headlight brights switch from the button on the floor of cars, to a lever near the steering wheel. For years that change caused problems for folks in my small hometown because they kept getting their feet tangled up in the steering wheel when they tried to put on their bright lights.

The stark reality is that the industries we have had the most difficulty with – banking, insurance, airlines, mortgage lending, and now car companies – are the most regulated. Less regulated businesses that are more sensitive to market demands, like Wal-Mart, Coke, Google, Caterpillar and Home Depot, are doing fine.

Washington still does not get it. We are taxed and regulated to death. The lone Democrat Senator in Massachusetts and

the man who was unable to beat George Bush, John Kerry, still wants to push through Cap-and-Trade. This is the same man who had the insight and vision to tap John Edwards as his Vice Presidential choice. Like Obama, Kerry helps to lose races in which he is not even running. If common sense and the facts do not kill the "cap-and-tax" bill, Kerry's support will.

Kerry disparages all the recently uncovered anti-global warming data as dishonest and agenda-driven. He also called the Republicans "dishonest." Coming from a man who is both a politician and a lawyer, that just had to hurt the feelings of the GOP. Make no mistake, he will be voted back into office by the Democratic machine in Massachusetts, while plaintiffs'-attorney-turned-baby-daddy Edwards should have been voted "Best in Show" at the Westminster Dog Show.

Don't get me wrong. I am all for saving the earth; it's the only planet known to have bourbon. But the fact that we are broke and that man-made global warming has been shown to be so much bunk should stop Democrats' attempt to control, regulate and tax more of the economy.

Toyota has all the business incentive in the world to protect its reputation. That is what drives businesses to do the right thing. When plaintiffs' attorneys and their brethren in the Democratic Congress make it difficult to address a problem for fear of litigation, then businesses will not act judiciously.

A president who is the new owner/operator of GM yet who still aspires to rid the world of the combustion engine, Obama finds it easy to attack foreign-owned Toyota. The current administration must remember, however, that when U.S. Toyota sales decline, employees at Toyota plants all across the South lose their jobs.

The global economy has done more to tie the world together than any "Kumbaya" political rhetoric. However, politicians clearly do not understand economics, or they would not be making all the bad, long-term decisions for our country that they have of late.

I believe in the goodness of people and the free-markets to sort this mess out. Shared economic interest is a powerful motivator. What I do not believe in is the goodness of politicians to aid the process.

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