then attempted to seek out facts later. The old saying goes, if the only tool you have is a hammer, everything starts to look like a nail. That is the case here. The radical conservative ideology that led to this report is like a steam hammer that its operators would like to use at all times, even if it means bashing away at the foundation of economic growth we are trying to build.

I notice this report did not mention any projects from my home State of New Jersey, and I guess, because the conclusion they wanted to draw was failure, that would make sense not to include projects in New Jersey because, in fact, if you look at the issue of how New Jersey is handling this among many other States in the Nation, you would have to take issue with the thousands of New Jerseyans who will owe their jobs to this act.

The report would have to take issue with an immediate tax cut for the average working family of up to $800, money that helped New Jerseyans pay their bills and support their families, or the over 1.5 million New Jerseyans who avoided the alternative minimum tax as a result of that law as well—more money in their pockets, less money going to the government.

You would have to take issue with the college students and parents of college students in New Jersey who are finding their term bills just a little easier to pay because of the increased Pell grants in the Recovery Act. In addition to higher education, it would have to take issue with all the ways public elementary and secondary schools are being improved with $957 million in funding that they would not otherwise have for critical needs ranging from up-to-date textbooks to better technology in the classroom.

It would have to take on all the teachers, police, and firefighters who have been able to keep their jobs and the individuals with disabilities who are now getting the support they need at school—made possible by the Recovery Act.

The Recovery Act was intended to create jobs fast, pump money into the economy quickly. How well has it done that in New Jersey? I saw firsthand how the funding created 250 construction and engineering jobs improving Route 46 in Lodi. It is a project that is going to reduce traffic congestion, cut down on the time it takes to commute, make it easier to do business, and protect the roadway against flooding so parents can feel just a little safer as they drive their kids in heavy rain.

I saw firsthand that the Recovery Act finally let us break ground on the Mass Transit Tunnel under the Hudson River that will ultimately create 6,000 jobs for several years and, at the end of the day, when that project is finished, over 50,000 permanent jobs. I met children who will be the future riders of that train and whose parents and neighbors are employed in its design, planning, and construction as we speak. In terms of infrastructure, you can see these results statewide.

The Recovery Act required our State Department of Transportation to get enough projects ready for bidding so that 50 percent of that funding could be set aside within 120 days to get people to work. New Jersey met that requirement and plans to allocate the funding for all of its projects by the end of this month. The Recovery Act has been a lifeline for New Jersey and, for that matter, for millions of people across the country.

I could not agree more that accountability is crucial. We understand that every dollar in the Recovery Act belongs to the American taxpayer. They deserve assurances that their money is being invested wisely. We have to ensure unprecedented transparency, oversight, and accountability so Americans can see not only how their money is being spent but also the results of their investments.

That is why this act is being personally overseen by the Vice President of the United States. And it is why the Act provides for so much transparency, such as a Web site with all of the information about it readily available to the public. Ironically, the fact that there is so much transparency is the reason an individual Senator can issue a report about it at all, and it is the reason we can figure out so easily that many of the assertions in that report are wrong.

Accountability means making sure our investments are smart and making corrections as need be. What accountability does not mean is attacking the job that hard-working men and women are doing, that the legislation made possible, because your ideology does not square with the facts.

That is not accounting, that is undermining. Frankly, after 8 years of undermining, the American people are ready to build up this country again. And with the Recovery Act, with health care reform, so not only those nearly 50 million Americans who have no health care coverage in the greatest Nation in all of the world, but at the same time millions more who are one paycheck away from losing it, and so many who have health insurance, but have told me that, in fact, after listening to their insurance company and following all of the rules, they still get denied for claims of coverage they need.

That is part of the reform we seek. With additional steps to make us energy independent, we are going to, in essence, rebuild this country. That is the process of saying ''yes'' to America, not ''no'' to America.

Madam President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. ALEXANDER. I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 10 minutes as in morning business on the Republican side.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

WASHINGTON TAKEOVER

Mr. ALEXANDER. Madam President, I just finished reading an excellent address by the Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan. Secretary Duncan made this to the National Governors Association. He said this:

> I am continually struck by the profound wisdom underlying the American political system. The genius of our system is that much of our power that shapes our future was wisely distributed to the States instead of being confined in Washington.

Continuing, he says:

> Our best ideas have always come from State and local governments, which are the real hothouses of innovation in America.

Secretary Duncan says:

> On so many issues: energy efficiency, mass transit, public safety, housing, economic development, [and then he goes on to say] education, it is the States that are often leading the way, sometimes with Federal help and sometimes without.

That is indeed the American way. That is my comment. The American way was recognized by President Lincoln who honored the importance of States. He argued for a limited Federal Government. He used the limited Federal Government to confer opportunities through the Transcontinental Railway, the Land Grant Colleges, the Homestead Act, instead of a ''Washington knows best'' command and control sort of Federal Government.

It has been our tradition to rely on decentralism of government and a free market to build our country, and it has given us the best colleges and universities, and a standard of living that produces 25 percent of all of the money in the world for just 5 percent of the people in the world, the Americans who live here.

Unfortunately, the wisdom that Secretary Duncan expressed seems to lie almost exclusively in the Department of Education in this administration. It is an oasis of common sense, because at an astonishing rate, almost everything else in Washington seems to think that Washington knows best.

I was visited by a European auto executive the other day who said to me jokingly: Well, I am glad to be in the new American automotive capital: Washington, DC. It is not only America's automotive headquarters, it is becoming America's banking center and it is becoming America's insurance center.

Unfortunately, even in education, Washington, DC is now about to become America's student loan center for 15 million students, because the administration believes Washington knows

best. Instead of having 2,000 banks make 15 million loans, we are going to have the U.S. Department of Education make the Secretary the banker of the year.

And now, we are discussing in the HELP Committee and in the Finance Committee a brazen takeover representing 16 percent of our economy which would say: Washington knows best about our health care system. Washington will become America's health care center as well.

The health care bill we are discussing in the HELP Committee, of which I am a member, would expand one failed government program, Medicaid, and create a new one, a new government insurance program, a so-called public option.

Those who support the public option—this includes our President—feel very strongly about it, and they speak eloquently about it. They say things such as one Senator said yesterday at our hearing, we need to ''keep the insurance companies honest.'' That is why we need a government-run insurance program. We need some ''good old-fashioned competition,'' so they said, and, ''we need to keep prices in check.'' They say that is why we need a government-run health insurance program.

Well, if that is the argument, perhaps we ought to start doing that with every sector of the economy, starting with automobiles. Why not buy the rest of General Motors—we already own 60 percent of it—and let's create a government car, and let's keep what is left of the American automobile industry honest by doing that. Let's have some good old-fashioned competition to keep prices in check.

We could own the car company, we could regulate the car company, we could subsidize the car company. And we could create a car that we knew is exactly the right size, the right color, that got 50 miles a gallon, that ran on ethanol, that had a solar panel, and that had a windmill on top. That would be the government car.

To be fair to the American communities across the country, because we would want to be, we could mandate that equal numbers of parts for the government car could be made in every congressional district and no one could buy an electric battery made in South Korea, even if it was the best battery in the world and would make the Chevy Volt an instant success.

We could have a board of directors on our government car company of 120 Members of the Congress or Senate. All of us, great car experts, right? We know how to build cars and trucks, how to design them, how to build them, how to sell them. And there are 120 of us who are the chairman or ranking member of some committee or subcommittee that has the authority to call the head of the car company into Washington, presumably driving his or her congressionally approved hybrid car, to come testify for 3 or 4 hours, and then drive back to Detroit having not a minute that day to design, build, or make a car.

That is what we could do. And we know what the result would be. The result would be a car a lot like the Soviet cars we all used to laugh about years ago. They were clunkers. They were the butt of jokes. They barely worked. No one wanted to buy them. And, of course, they kept lowering the price, so that people would want them. Pretty soon they priced everybody else out of business. There was only one car, the government car, and people either drove the government car or they walked, or they took the Metro, or they found some other way, maybe a bicycle.

That is what we are talking about here when we talk about a government-run health insurance program to keep the health insurance companies honest. It is the same idea as having a government-run car program to keep the American automobile companies honest.

We already have one government-run health care program. We call it Medicaid. It is a terrible example. The Government Accountability Office says we literally waste 10 percent of every dollar of all of the dollars that we give to Medicaid. That is $32 billion a year. It is filled with lawsuits, bureaucracies, inefficiencies. It is a tremendous expense to States. It is ruining higher education because Governors and legislatures are putting every available dollar into Medicaid, and they have nothing left for the community colleges.

The worst of it is it does not provide service. It is like giving you a Metro pass and there is no subway. Approximately 40 percent of the doctors will not serve Medicaid patients—low-income Americans—because of the low reimbursement rates.

So what do we have with our great government program called Medicaid? Twice as many Medicaid patients go to the emergency room to get their care as do uninsured Americans going to the emergency room. That is what we have with that government program.

Yet the Kennedy bill which we are considering in the Senate HELP Committee, the only bill we are considering even though there are other alternatives on the table, would expand that government-run program by 150 percent, increase its costs both to the Federal Government and to States, all in the name of keeping insurance companies honest.

There is a better way to give subsidies or grants to low-income Americans so they may buy their own health insurance.

There is a better way with autos as well. Instead of having a government car for the next 4 or 5 years, with politicians meddling in how GM and Chrysler operate their business, let's give the stock we own back to the American people. Give the 60 percent of General Motors stock and the 8 percent of Chrysler stock to the 120 million Americans who paid taxes on April 15 of this year. The reason would be they paid for it, they should own it. Some might say: Well, let's sell the stock. I would favor selling the stock. I would like to get the stock out of Washington and end this incestuous relationship of Congressmen calling up the President of General Motors and saying: Do not close the warehouse in my district. But it might take several years, according to the President of GM, to sell that block of stock. So the faster way to do it is a stock distribution, a corporate spinoff.

Proctor & Gamble did this with Clorox in 1969. Time Warner did it with Time Warner Cable in March of 2009. All of the stockholders of Time Warner simply received shares in Time Warner Cable. PepsiCo did it with its restaurant businesses—KFC, Pizza Hut, and Taco Bell. If you owned shares of PepsiCo, suddenly you had some of Colonel Sander's stock. PepsiCo shareholders received one share in the new restaurant company.

Madam President, would you let me know when I have 1 minute remaining, please?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator has 30 seconds remaining.

Mr. ALEXANDER. I ask unanimous consent for an additional minute.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. ALEXANDER. These companies did all of this when the main company decided that the subsidiary was not consistent with the core business. That is what we should do with General Motors—give taxpayers its shares and get General Motors back in the marketplace where it belongs. This idea is fast, it is simple, and it creates a market for the shares.

The United States is not like the Soviet Union where people are not used to handling shares. Half of American families own shares of stock. Distributing government owned shares in General Motors to taxpayers would create a fan base for the next Chevy, like the fan base for the Green Bay Packers, where the people in the community own the football team.

I have been giving ''Car Czar'' awards to political meddlers to put a spotlight on this incestuous relationship in Washington. American manufacturing of autos will not succeed if Washington is America's new automotive headquarters. Neither will American insurance succeed, neither will American banking succeed, neither will students be happy waiting outside the Department of Education for their student loans, and neither will health care help low-income Americans if Washington is the headquarters.

Later today or tomorrow I hope to be able to offer my amendment, cosponsored by Senators BENNETT, KYL, and others, to give all of the General Motors stock and all of the Chrysler stock our federal government owns back to

the people who paid for it. They paid for it; they should own it. Let's get the Washington meddlers out of the automobile business and auto manufacturing back on its feet.

I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD newspaper articles supporting the Auto Stock for Every Taxpayer Act I have introduced and plan to offer as soon as I am able.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From Newsweek]

BARNEY FRANK, CAR GUY AND GREEN GUY. SO HE PRESSURES GM.

(By George F. Will)

General Motors changed its mind. Or maybe not. It is unclear that GM still has a mind of its own, so let us just say that GM changed its decision. The company first announced that it was going to close a parts-distribution center in Norton, Mass. Then it heard from the congressman who represents that community, Barney Frank.

That Democrat chairs the Financial Services Committee, which is mightily important to GM now that it is an appendage of the federal government, which soon will own 60 percent of it. Frank talked to GM's CEO, Fritz Henderson. So the distribution center will not be closed for at least another 14 months.

Is this a glimpse of what life is going to be like under the political economy of state capitalism? Heaven forfend, says Frank. To The Hill newspaper he said, ''I don't think this will lead to a pattern,'' because, well, because the distribution facility was not a dealership or an assembly plant. If that strikes you as a non sequitur, this will, too: Frank stressed that what he did was not improper because he talked to Henderson rather than to someone in the Obama administration. Which is significant because . . . never mind.

Frank's motive for intervening in GM's decision making was not political but altruistic. Really. He wanted to save the planet. If the Norton facility were closed, he says, GM parts for New England would be trucked from Philadelphia, and that would complicate the task of turning down Earth's thermostat.

Nowadays, green reasoning is the first refuge of scoundrels. Global warming has become like God: It is an explanation for everything and an all-purpose excuse for the political class to do whatever it wants to do. What a large portion of it wants to do—what it has a metabolic urge to do—is boss people around. It can maximize its opportunities for doing that if it maximizes the number of people dependent on government, and the number of ways in which they are dependent.

Sometimes bribing is a substitute for bossing, as with the ''cash for clunkers'' idea: Give vouchers worth up to $4,500 to people who trade in their vehicles for more fuel-efficient ones. One rationale for this is, of course, green: It would put a cool compress on Mother Earth's supposedly fevered brow. But the plan also is yet another bailout for the bottomless money pit called Detroit. The plan would entice customers into showrooms.

But in a cri de coeur published last week in The Wall Street Journal, two of the senators who dreamed this up lamented that something has gone horribly wrong. Dianne Feinstein, the California Democrat, and Susan Collins, the Maine Republican, are surprised and scandalized that their proposal for manipulating the market has been hijacked by industry lobbyists, who have a different manipulation agenda.

Feinstein and Collins tied their vouchers to purchases of vehicles meeting high fuel-efficiency standards. But the bill passed by the House, and a companion bill lurking in the Senate, would make vouchers available for vehicles meeting less exacting standards. This would help dealers move their unsold inventories of SUVs, pickups and other large vehicles. Feinstein and Collins denounce this as ''handouts for Hummers'' and say it is evidence of ''how quickly a good idea can go bad in Washington.''

Actually, it is evidence of what a bad idea they had—getting the government into the business of fine-tuning customers' choices. Once such market manipulations are given a seal of progressive approval, it is not a jaw-dropping shock that things will become messy, with factions competing to get the government to do their bidding.

Two other senators have three better ideas pertaining to the government's wallow in the auto industry. A bill written by Tennessee Republican Lamar Alexander and Utah Republican Bob Bennett would prohibit using any more TARP funds for GM or Chrysler. And it would require that as long as the government owns stock in the companies, the Treasury would have a fiduciary duty to see that the government's investment is managed with the single objective of maximizing the return to taxpayers—not to advance any environmental (hi, Barney), trade, energy, labor or other policy. And it would require the Treasury to distribute, within a year, all its GM and Chrysler stock evenly to the approximately 120 million persons who paid 2008 income taxes.

Although two years ago a share of GM's stock was worth $40, last Friday it was worth $1.22, and now GM has a new government—chosen chairman of its board of directors, Edward Whitacre Jr., who says, ''I don't know anything about cars,'' which means he is like those who appointed him. So the stock distribution will not soon be a bonanza to taxpayers. But unwinding the government's entanglement with GM might be.

[From the New York Times, June 12, 2009]

AUTO DEALERS AT RISK TURN TO WASHINGTON

(By Carl Hulse and Bernie Becker)

WASHINGTON.—Auto dealers accustomed to negotiating sales on their car lots clustered in the Capitol instead this week, looking to their trusty, neighborhood lawmakers to do some hard bargaining for them.

With about 2,000 Chrysler and General Motors dealers losing their franchises as the companies retrench, the dealers are pressing Congress to reverse what they see as an unfair process forcing some profitable businesses to close or stop selling new autos, with no explanation from the manufacturers of why they were singled out.

''We have never gotten one,'' said Rick Shaub, the owner of Montrose Dodge in Germantown, Md. He was with fellow dealers outside the office of the House majority leader, Steny H. Hoyer, on Wednesday, the day after his family's three-generation relationship with Chrysler came to an end.

As they lobby Congress, angry dealers are finding an increasingly receptive audience in the House and Senate, where lawmakers say the mass termination of franchises by the bankrupt car companies is threatening tens of thousands of jobs, not to mention the civic fabric of communities where car dealerships are often a chief local institution.

''The dealers in these small towns are kind of the heart of the town,'' said Senator Tom Udall, Democrat of New Mexico, who estimated that 12 G.M. dealers and six Chrysler dealers were affected in his state. ''They sponsor the Little League; the big guy in town is usually the car dealer. I am worried about it.''

But the campaign on behalf of the dealers is also providing a test of one of the central criticisms of the government's intrusion into the operations of many companies, from banks to insurers to auto giants. Even as they talk tough about the mismanagement of car companies, can members of Congress withstand political pressure and allow Chrysler and G.M. to make tough economic decisions that might hurt their own constituents?

For instance, Representative Barney Frank, the Massachusetts Democrat who heads the House Financial Services Committee, came under fire for intervening with G.M. to keep a parts distribution center open in his district, preserving about 90 jobs for another year. Critics said Mr. Frank used his sway as an overseer of federal bailout money to intervene in the company's decision-making.

Mr. Frank said that he made a commonsense argument to keep the center open, and that he was only standing up for his constituents. ''I will bear up under the criticism that I have been doing too much for my district,'' he said.

Other lawmakers said the growing number of calls for intervention showed the dangers of large-scale government involvement in the auto companies, saying the result would be lawmakers trying to serve as top executives of auto companies.

''It is incestuous for members of Congress to be saying, 'Close this plant; use this model; don't buy the Volt battery in South Korea but make it in my district,'" said Senator Lamar Alexander, Republican of Tennessee, referring to the G.M. hybrid car now in development.

Senator Alexander has instituted a ''car czar of the day'' award in recognition of Congressional meddling. ''What do people in Washington know about building cars?'' he said. ''I don't think very much.''

Even lawmakers backing the dealers expressed mixed emotions about dipping into the workings of the auto companies. But the dealer closings are striking a nerve in Congress. The federal government has been coming to the aid of the auto manufacturers, which lawmakers see as then turning around and abandoning the element of the industry closest to home for most of them.

Representative Frank M. Kratovil, a Maryland Democrat who has introduced a measure that would restore the franchise agreements, portrayed the situation as a ''bailout for the big guys, but a force-out for the little guys.''

In the Senate, lawmakers have not gone as far as the House in pushing a bill to block the move by the manufacturers. But members of the Senate commerce committee this week urged Chrysler to allow dealers a chance to appeal the closures and for both carmakers to give preference to existing, profitable operations when the automakers try to set up new franchises in areas where dealers were shut off. G.M. already has an appeals process for dealers scheduled for closure.

''We think—in the interest of fairness—that profitable dealers in this situation should have a right of first refusal for the new dealership when Chrysler returns to that particular market,'' read a letter signed by Senator John D. Rockefeller IV, the West Virginia Democrat who heads the committee, along with other members. A similar letter was sent to G.M.

The car companies say that they need to scale back to be able to return to profitability and that cutting the number of dealers is crucial to that effort.

At a hearing last week of the commerce committee, Fritz Henderson, the chief executive of G.M., said that much of the growth in

his company's dealer network occurred decades ago. Since then, he said, ''our market share has shrunk, leaving us with too many dealerships.''

''Everyone agrees—even the dealers themselves—that a restructuring of G.M.'s dealer network must take place,'' Mr. Henderson said.

Some point to the millions of dollars in campaign contributions that politically active car dealers have given to Congressional candidates over the years in explaining the intense interest in going to bat for the dealers. But lawmakers say that they are only trying to protect local jobs at companies that have persevered in difficult times and that donations have nothing to do with it.

Representative Dan Maffei, a freshman Democrat from New York who helped write the measure to protect the dealers, said that in his case, local car dealers strongly supported the opposition. ''The vast majority are either nonpolitical or support the other party pretty strongly,'' Mr. Maffei said.

Mr. Maffei said he hoped his legislation, which has already attracted about 70 cosponsors, would spur new negotiations between the car companies and the dealers.

The Obama administration has so far shown no inclination to push back against the closures, noting that its efforts on behalf of the manufacturers have kept most dealers in business. And with Chrysler already cutting its ties with dealers, undoing those decisions might be difficult. But lawmakers say they intend to try.

''We are sure that if we do nothing, nothing will happen,'' said Representative Hoyer, the House majority leader and a Maryland Democrat, who is backing the effort to restore the franchise contracts.

But it may be too late to help Mr. Shaub. Workers on Thursday were answering the phone at his business as Montrose Automotive rather than Montrose Dodge. ''I am not sure this is going to do any good,'' he said of the Congressional effort.

[From Politico, June 10, 2009]

MEMBERS TAKE AUTO CLOSINGS PERSONALLY

(By Lisa Lerer)

On Monday, Republican Sen. Lamar Alexander excoriated House Financial Services Committee Chairman Barney Frank for privately urging the CEO of GM to keep a plant open in his Massachusetts district, jokingly calling Frank the ''car czar.''

But on Tuesday, Alexander admitted he's not above taking similar actions to protect a GM plant in his home state of Tennessee.

''I, of course, will urge that the Spring Hill plant be a contender for a GM product in the future,'' Alexander said. ''I'll be doing what every congressman would be doing.''

Alexander's two-sided approach captures the complicated web of interests lawmakers weave as they call for greater transparency from troubled U.S. automakers while lobbying behind the scenes to protect the dealerships, distribution plants and parts manufacturers in their own backyards.

''Members have treated a potential dealership closure just like a potential plant closing,'' said David Regan, National Automobile Dealers Association vice president for, legislative affairs. ''There's been a significant amount of congressional interest.''

Legislation that would effectively halt plans by GM and Chrysler to close dealerships is expected to move through the House Financial Services Committee, chaired by the powerful Frank.

''We in Congress have put ourselves into an incestuous position,'' said Alexander. ''We shouldn't be putting ourselves a position of making calls like that.''

Yet they can't help themselves.

On Tuesday, Sen. John Rockefeller (D–W. Va.) and 19 other members of the Senate Commerce Committee sent letters to the CEOs of GM and Chrysler asking the companies to address several issues related to the dealership closings by Friday. The committee has questions about how rural consumers will get service and about the termination of profitable dealerships, among other issues. Several of the signers are also aiding individual appeals from dealerships in their districts.

Good-governance watchdogs see abuse in the double-edged effort.

''You have Barney Frank at the table making decisions that affect the auto industry across the board and then he's playing favorites,'' said Melanie Sloan, executive director of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics. ''You don't get to both be at the table and demanding the auto industry make concessions which includes closing dealerships, and then say, 'But not mine.' ''

But Democrats insist the individual lobbying doesn't undermine their efforts to force the auto companies to become more transparent about how they targeted dealerships for closure.

''Mostly it's going to be based on the facts and the money,'' said Minnesota Democrat Amy Klobuchar, who said she's written letters on behalf of dealers who are appealing their decisions.

''It's normal that members are going to urge for decisions to be made that benefit their constituents,'' said Sen. Carl Levin (D–Mich.). ''I don't expect that there will be a lot of changes.''

The White House auto task force wants GM to close 2,600 of its 6,000 dealerships by 2010. Chrysler told nearly 800 dealerships that they have less than a month to close. The closures could affect 100,000 workers, according to the National Automobile Dealers Association.

The companies have faced a backlash from members of Congress who argue that the market, not the automakers, should determine which dealerships stay in business. They question whether manufactures are closing profitable dealership to circumvent expensive contracts or targeting dealerships that had previously clashed with the companies.

On Wednesday, the CEOs of General Motors and Chrysler will testify before the House Energy and Commerce Committee. The Senate Banking Committee plans to question administration officials overseeing the auto rescue efforts.

''The White House needs to be fully apprised of this and [needs] to review this process,'' said Sen. Olympia Snowe (R–Maine). ''There's just no rhyme or reason to this process.''

And Snowe added that she hopes ''to have some personal calls'' with the White House about the dealership closures.

House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer said on Tuesday that he supports legislation that would force General Motors and Chrysler to honor existing contracts with dealers.

''The dealers are being affected in a way that will adversely affect many, many communities around this country without an economic benefit to the manufacturers,'' said Hoyer.

His comments followed on a Monday letter more than 120 lawmakers sent to President Barack Obama, urging the White House to delay further action until there is more review of how GM and Chrysler selected the dealerships.

''It is our view that the market should make these decisions rather than leaving it up to the manufacturers whose poor leadership contributed to their demise,'' the lawmakers wrote.

''While we understand the desire to reduce the number of unprofitable dealerships, no one has yet sufficiently explained the need to close profitable dealerships.''

Auto companies argue that the closures are necessary for their survival. The manufacturers are making fewer cars and can't support the same number of dealers.

''Ideally, automakers would love to have the sales to support the current dealer network; however, with roughly 7 million fewer units being sold this year compared to just two years ago, there are economic realties that manufacturers and dealers need to face,'' said Charles Territo, spokesman for the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers.

BREAKING DOWN GOVERNMENT MOTORS

(By Brian Darling)

During a recent speech denouncing capitalism, Venezuelan strong man Hugo Chavez said, ''Obama has just nationalized nothing more and nothing less than General Motors. Comrade Obama! Fidel, careful or we are going to end up to his right.'' The conversion of General Motors to Government Motors should be of grave concern to all Americans. It appears that President Bush's bailout of Wall Street merely set the table for an all-out assault by the Obama administration on capitalism.

Thankfully, freedom still has a voice in Congress. Sen. Mike Johanns (R–Neb.) introduced legislation that would require Congressional approval before the government takes ownership of a private enterprise. This bill would allow Congress to stop the current shift away from free-market principles.

Johanns is not the only free-marketer. Sen. Lamar Alexander (R–Tenn.) has introduced legislation to require the federal government to distribute its ownership shares in General Motors and Chrysler to taxpayers when those companies emerge from bankruptcy proceedings. Alexander argues, ''instead of the Treasury owning 6o percent of shares in the new GM and 8 percent of Chrysler, you would own them, if you were one of about 120 million individuals who paid taxes on April 15. This is the fastest way to get the stock out of the hands of Washington and back into the hands of the American people in the marketplace where it belongs.''

Sen. John Thune (R–S.D.) also joined the fray last weekend, introducing legislation that would restore private ownership to companies that have been effectively nationalized. The Thune proposal would make July 1, 2010 a new day of independence. By that date, the government would have to sell any ownership stake acquired over the past year-and-a-half. There's no better way to fight the ever-expanding power of the federal government's ownership in private enterprises than to legislate it out of existence.

Speaking of debt, Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke told the House Budget Committee earlier this month ''we cannot allow ourselves to be in a situation where the debt continues to rise.'' Sen. Jim Bunning (R–Ky.) responded, ''Bernanke helped open up the floodgates of government spending for the last year. Did he finally have an epiphany this morning before the House Budget Committee or is he just trying to cover-up his mistakes? America is looking at mounting debt because of Chairman Bernanke's support of policies that will put the American taxpayer an estimated $2.8 trillion more in the red.'' The recent explosion of government spending and expansion of the money supply by the Fed are poor decisions by the Obama administration that will further lead America down the pothole-filled road to socialism.

THE SUPREME COURT OF HEALTH CARE

The recently released health reform legislation drafted by Sen. Ted Kennedy (D–

Mass.) contains numerous provisions that propose fundamental changes to our health care system. Many are deeply troubling. One is the call for a Medical Advisory Council that would be comprised of Washington bureaucrats with the power to make significant decisions on health policy for all Americans. This Council would become the Supreme Court of health care, and these unelected bureaucrats would make final decisions about your treatment options.

The Kennedy bill includes an individual mandate requiring all Americans to purchase a health insurance plan approved by the federal government. The Medical Advisory Council would decide what constitutes a ''qualified health insurance plan.'' It would also determine the ''essential health care benefits'' that would be included in the much-discussed and debated public-run government plan that would compete against private health insurance plans if it's created.

To recap: a faceless group of Washington bureaucrats could be making life-and-death decisions about private health care for individuals.

Rather than propose reforms that truly offer Americans better and more affordable health care, Senate Democrats and the Obama administration seem eager to expand the role of government in the lives of individual Americans and their families. By pushing legislation that contains things like the Medical Advisory Board these politicians are endangering our freedoms and seek to come between individuals and their health care choices.

''SAVE'' THE CLIMATE—HURT FARMERS

The national energy tax snaking its way through the House of Representatives has a new potential victim—farmers. The cap-and-trade scheme would increase energy prices, building costs and a slow the economy. My colleagues at The Heritage Foundation calculate that farm income, which is the pre-tax amount that farmers live on after all their expenses, would drop 28% in the bill's first year. In 2035, the last year analyzed, farm income drops a whopping 98%. These numbers should raise a red flag for Midwesteners, and cause concern among all Americans who eat.

[From the Athens Banner-Herald, June 9, 2009]

EDITORIAL: GIMMICKY AUTO BILL FRAMES SERIOUS ISSUE

The name betrays it for the political stunt that, in part, it is. But that's not to say having Georgia Republican U.S. Sen. Johnny Isakson sign on to something called the Auto Stock for Every Taxpayer Act is anywhere near as embarrassing as having another Georgia Republican in Washington, our own Congressman Paul Broun, dubbing energy legislation sponsored by Democratic legislators dward Markey and Henry Waxman the ''Wacky-Marxist bill.''

The stunt in the proposed Auto Stock for Every Taxpayer Act, sponsored by Tennessee Republican Sen. Lamar Alexander and appended to a piece of tobacco regulation legislation, is its call for the U.S. Treasury to distribute an equal share of stock in General Motors and Chrysler to the 120 million Americans who filed tax returns on April 15.

The distribution would be undertaken a year after the companies emerge from bankruptcy, on the argument that American taxpayers who are funding the federal bailouts of the two companies hold, through the U.S. Treasury, 60 percent and 8 percent ownership stakes, respectively, in the enterprises.

Of course, the flaw in this proposal is that it's far from clear what General Motors and Chrysler will look like, and what their stock will be worth, even a year after they emerge from bankruptcy. For a reality check, take a look at GM stock. Delisted from the New York Stock Exchange as its stock hit 75 cents per share, GM was trading Tuesday afternoon around $1.50 per share on the over-the-counter market.

And, of course, the fact that the federal government now has a hand in running the auto companies isn't necessarily cause for optimism. As Alexander noted in a news release on his proposal last week, ''there are at least 60 congressional committees and subcommittees authorized to hold hearings on auto companies and most of them will, probably many times. You can just imagine the questions. About what the next model should look like. About which plant should be closed. . . . What the work rules and salaries should be?''

So maybe the Auto Stock for Every Taxpayer Act isn't the key to boosting millions of American families' college or retirement funds. But that—except for the fact that it allows a catchy title to be assigned to the legislation—isn't necessarily the point here.

The real meat of the proposal is its call to prohibit the U.S. Treasury from using any more federal Troubled Asset Relief Program fund—read American taxpayer dollars—to bail out GM or Chrysler. As Isakson correctly notes in his own news release announcing his support for Sen. Alexander's bill, ''I believe it was obvious back in December 2008 that a structured bankruptcy was the correct path for GM and Chrysler to restructure their debt and contracts. By giving these companies taxpayer funds from TARP, the administration only delayed the inevitable . . . .''

Outside its somewhat gimmicky approach, the Auto Stock for Every Taxpayer Act does serve to highlight the serious philosophical issues surrounding the question of whether the free market should be allowed to operate unfettered with regard to major segments of the American automobile industry.

It's a question that deserves some serious consideration in Congress.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Florida.

TRAVEL PROMOTION ACT

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Madam President, the distinguished Senator from Tennessee is a great gentleman. He is a pleasure to work with.

The legislation that is on the Senate floor is the Travel Promotion Act. This is an important piece of legislation that will help our economy because it promotes travel to the United States, and it promotes travel to areas not traditionally visited which will highlight the United States as a premier travel destination. The bill initiates a nationally coordinated travel promotion campaign established in a public-private partnership to increase international travel to the United States. It also creates a corporation for travel promotion, an independent, nonprofit corporation, to run the travel promotion campaign. The program will be funded equally by a small fee paid by foreign travelers coming into the United States and by matching contributions from the travel industry.

It is interesting that the Department of Commerce announced that 3.8 million international visitors traveled to this country in March 2009, which was a decrease of 20 percent compared to March of 2008. Total visitation in the first quarter of 2009 was down 14 percent from the first quarter of 2008. International visitors spent almost $10 billion during the month of March, 16 percent less than they had a year ago. This March of 2009 marks the fifth consecutive month of decreases in international visitor spending. So the bill is going to go a long way to help reverse the declining trend.

I remember back in the 1980s, when I, as a Member of the House of Representatives, chaired the U.S. Congressional Travel and Tourism Caucus. We had this little agency in the Department of Commerce that leveraged so much of the taxpayers' dollars by advertising overseas to get visitors to come here which brought spending to our shores. That is what we are trying to recreate here in the meantime and have been shut down. We are certainly cutting off our noses to spite our faces. This legislation clearly is something that is important to the country.

It is important to Florida because, of course, my State is one of the first destinations of foreign travelers coming to the United States. Despite obvious attractions such as Disney World, Florida beaches are ranked 1, 2, and 3, and No. 9 in a recent ranking of all beaches as the best beaches in the United States. Clearly, this is good for Florida. It is good for the United States. I hope we will get on with it and pass this legislation.

RISING GAS PRICES

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Madam President, while we debate the Tourism Promotion Act, we are remiss to not mention the fact that as we are going into this travel and tourism season of summer, what is happening with gas prices. Gas prices have risen for the last 50 days. It has been the longest record streak of rises, dating back to 1996. The national average of gas has gone from $1.61 a year ago to more than $2.67 a gallon today. Crude oil is now over $70 a barrel. It has doubled in the last 4 months. How soon we forget the lessons we learned a year ago during last summer. In the runup of the oil and gas prices, it wasn't the result of the fundamental concepts of supply and demand. It is largely runup due to excessive and unchecked speculators on unregulated commodities futures markets, running up the price of oil as they speculate buying and selling.

It is a fact that across America, we are using less gas. According to the Energy Information Administration, demand for petroleum products in this country is lower today than it was 10 years ago. According to the EIA, the supply of petroleum products is higher than it was in 1982. So we wonder why. If this isn't being caused by supply and demand, which it isn't, but gas prices keep going up, what is happening?

There is going to be an amendment on this bill offered by Senator SANDERS. I ask unanimous consent to be