



## Feds have their Toyota bashing pedal to the metal

By Jim Waters

Punk rocker Sid Vicious said, “Today, everything’s a conflict of interest.”

Perhaps. But some interests and the conflicts they cause become greater than others.

Gov. Steve Beshear’s recent response to Toyota’s turmoil puts him in a quandary.

Beshear gets strong political support from labor unions with a declining but politically potent membership. Yet in the end, his “interest” in getting re-elected requires him to defend nonunionized Toyota against federal government grandstanding.

Not even the possibility of losing support from “Government Motors” labor-union bosses can counter Beshear’s “interest” in supporting the 6,800 non-union workers at Toyota’s Georgetown operation – the automaker’s largest outside Japan. Many of those folks could help decide whether Beshear keeps his job.

Whatever his motivation, the governor gets an “Attaboy!” for telling the feds to back off.

The Courier-Journal [reported](#) that Beshear signed a letter citing Washington’s “obvious conflict of interest because of its huge financial stake in some of Toyota’s competitors” followed by an interview during which he pointed out: “[recalls are common](#), but the reaction to the three Toyota recalls since November is not.”

He’s right.

Consider:

- There have been fewer than 100 reported complaints about the Corolla.
- Car and Driver executive editor Mike Dushane reported: “the numbers don’t reveal a meaningful problem.”
- The alleged fatality risk for Toyota vehicles is about 1 in 200,000 versus a 1 in 8,000 risk of a fatal car accident in any U.S. car.
- Media reports largely ignore the role driver inattentiveness may play in the Toyota complaints.

None of this matters to labor-union bosses and their lackeys in Congress who are bound by a root of bitterness toward a nonunionized manufacturer’s success on American soil. The Associated Press reported that James Bell, executive market analyst for the vehicle information provider Kelley Blue Book Co. Inc., claimed executives at one of [Toyota’s rivals were “grinning from ear to ear”](#) at a recent meeting.

Imagine the disdain of labor-subservient political leaders if Toyota’s top managers were “grinning inanely” at an American competitor’s demise. United Auto Worker bosses’ hissy fits would continue to

this day had the nation's top transportation official told Americans to "stop driving your Explorers" after faulty tires forced the Ford Motor Co. to recall vehicles in 2000 and 2001.

Ray LaHood, U.S. secretary of Transportation, suggested Toyota drivers "stop driving" their vehicles, something he later called a "misstatement." How would his "misstatement" have set with the Jimmy Hoffas of the world had it been pointed at a unionized, bankrupt, government-owned American operation?

Imagine the UAW's disdain had House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Henry Waxman, D-Calif., taken aim at, say, Chrysler with the same vigor displayed in his attempt to weaken Toyota.

Perhaps it's time for voters to issue their own recall – of defective politicians insensitive enough to swing a wrecking ball at a major company that employs thousands of Americans.

Fortunately, history shows that while Toyota's "check engine" light may have come on, the automaker isn't headed to the junkyard anytime soon. The year following its recall, Ford sold a record 433,837 Explorers.

The market punished Toyota for its safety defects. In the first few weeks following the recall, its stock plunged 19 percent and it lost tens of billions in market capital.

Federal leaders have lost the credibility to fulfill their *proper* role – impartial regulation – because they took on an *improper* one — ownership of automotive manufacturing firms. It doesn't take a transportation secretary to figure out that means "Government Motors" holds a vested interest in weakening its competition.

The "check engine" light came on in my Corolla once, but we're still rolling at 198,173 and counting – just like I hope Toyota will be for a long, long time.

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