

## U.S. Department of Autos

By MR. RUSS HARDING | 1/14/2010 2:35 PM

The Climategate Auto Panel hosted by The Detroit News during the first week of the North American International Auto Show in Detroit was most interesting, but not for the reasons I expected. I braved frigid temperatures and icy roads as I drove from Lansing to Detroit, expecting a lively debate on global warming and government regulations affecting the American automobile industry. My expectations were exceeded by the amazing public revelation that domestic carmakers are relying on further government intervention for their survival.

The panel had an all-star lineup consisting of U.S. Congressman Fred Upton; Henry Pollack, climatologist from the University of Michigan; Patrick Michaels, climatologist from The Cato Institute; Kathryn Clay, director of research at the Alliance of Automobile Manufactures; Myron Ebell, director of energy and global warming at the Competitive Enterprise Institute; and Skip Pruss, director of the Michigan Department of Energy, Labor & Economic Growth. The panel was moderated by Frank Beckmann of WJR radio.

As expected, there was substantial disagreement as to whether the Climategate scandal should have any substantial impact on federal regulations that will dictate the type of cars Americans will be forced to drive in the future. Skip Pruss and Henry Pollack proclaimed human-caused global warming is real and the Climategate scandal is of little importance in relation to re-examining the new, stringent federal Corporate Average Fuel Economy standards that will radically change the kind of cars Americans drive. Congressman Upton, Pat Michaels and Myron Ebell took the opposite view that stringent CAFÉ standards will do damage to the automobile industry and the greater economy while doing little to change climate.

The most remarkable and astonishing comments, however, came from Kathryn Clay, representing the American automobile industry. In response to a question from Frank Beckmann, Ms. Clay did not refute that the future of green cars are dependent upon government subsidies and mandates. Even more remarkable was her assertion that government must cause the cost of gasoline to increase through enacting cap-and-trade legislation or some other mechanism (a sentiment reaffirmed by Robert Lutz, General Motors vice chairman, as reported by CNN Money.com).

Any pretense that we have a private automobile industry in this country was abandoned at the Auto Show. At least the industry's spokespeople are admitting that the only hope for selling green cars to the motoring public is for the government to mandate and subsidize their production while forcing higher gasoline prices. The end result will be that the public will have no choice but to buy their products. The future of the U.S. auto industry looks bleak.

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