

Every Dog Has His Day

By Musafir



“The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool.”

—William Shakespeare, “As You Like It”, Act 5 scene 1

I truly believe that brilliance or mediocrity can be a matter of perception and it can vary widely under different circumstances. It is also possible for mediocrity to be thrust upon someone who has achieved greatness on his own merit. Ironically both condemnation and commendation can be projected onto anyone even by the most incompetent, insincere and insipid of people.

Take the case of Mr. Rick Wagoner, the CEO and Chairman of General Motors Corporation (GM). When he became CEO of GM, Mr. Wagoner inherited a bad labor contract including the infamous ‘jobs bank.’ He did not create those woeful circumstances. In fact, he almost completed a brilliant streamlining of the company by negotiating with the UAW to relieve GM of pension and retiree health care obligations by the year 2011. He expanded GM’s operations around the globe simultaneously improving quality and productivity. He reduced the U.S. hourly workforce by 52 percent, from 133,000 to 64,000. During the same period, he also cut U.S. salaried employment from 44,000 to fewer than 30,000, and reduced the U.S. executive ranks by 45 percent. He sold a 51 percent stake in GMAC. Let’s not forget his “Keep America Rolling” program in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. We owe a debt of gratitude to him for saving America from untold economic ruin. Then came the credit crunch in the fourth quarter of 2008. That was not of Mr. Wagoner’s making. Car sales in the U.S. dropped to 11 million units (annualized).

When grilled in Congress, Mr. Wagoner aptly replied that the sudden deterioration was due to “the global financial crisis, which has severely restricted credit availability, and reduced industry sales to the lowest per-capita level since World War II.”

Yes, Mr. Wagoner traveled to Washington in a company jet.

“It’s almost like seeing a guy show up at the soup kitchen in a high hat and tuxedo,” quipped Rep. Gary Ackerman, D-N.Y. “Couldn’t you have downgraded to first class or something, or jet-pooled or something to get here?”

That was quite condescending, Congressman! Have you heard of the economic concept of ‘competitive advantage?’ It makes more economic sense for Mr. Wagoner to fly in a company jet than spend hours at the airport or spend 24 hours on road to come to a hearing.

Mr. Ackerman, you represent New York’s 5th Congressional District. The per capita income of your constituency is \$24,296 per annum. Almost 5% of the people you represent live below poverty level. Why are you donning an expensive suit? Why don’t you buy a t-shirt and khakis from Wal-Mart like the people you supposedly represent?

Moreover, Mr. Ackerman, you cannot match the work ethic of the man you were grilling (Mr. Wagoner). You have missed voting on 80 occasions on a variety of issues, including the Pension Protection Act, the Tax Relief Extension Reconciliation Act and many more. (Source: Washington Post). The man you were grilling has worked hard to ensure pensions to hundreds of thousands of retirees so that the American public does not have to worry about that.

“The firms continue to trail their major competitors in almost every category necessary to compete,” said Richard Shelby, the Senator from Alabama.

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