

# Opinions

## Auto executive bonuses taking consumer for ride

By Richard A. Viguerie

"We've been 'had'." That's how Bill Brock, President Reagan's trade representative, described the gigantic bonuses paid to the top management of the U.S. auto industry.

Brock was angry because, for nearly four years, the U.S. government has kept the price of each automobile at least \$1,000 higher than it should be. Instead of using the extra money to protect workers' jobs, the auto companies decided to give their executives some of the highest bonuses in the history of American business.

The chairman of General Motors took home a bonus of \$865,490 in cash and stock, in addition to his \$625,000 salary. The president of GM got a \$790,000 bonus added to his \$550,000 salary. In all, GM's top 5,800 executives received average bonuses of \$31,000 each.

Ford gave its executives bonuses totalling \$81 million. Its chairman received \$7.3 million in salary, bonus, and stock options.

At Chrysler, the two highest officials got a total of \$1.7 million, and Chrysler's proposed bonuses for 1,500 top officers amount to \$35,000 apiece.

Of course, companies have the right to pay their executives as much as they like. If Michael Jackson can get \$10 million to promote Pepsi, and if TV anchorpeople and football players can earn millions of dollars, corporation executives have the same right to charge as much as they can get for their services.

...provided, of course, that the corporations pay them with their own money. But that's not what GM, Ford, and Chrysler did. They got the money by convincing the government to limit imports, restrict competition, and let them charge outrageous and unjustified prices for their product. Just last year, auto import quotas cost consumers some \$5 billion.

Here's how it happened: The auto industry, reeling under years of mismanagement and over-

regulation, asked for protection from Japanese competition.

The industry claimed that, if the government would restrict imports for two years -- three years at the most -- U.S. companies could modernize and once again compete openly with the makers of Toyotas and Datsuns.

The U.S. government worked out a deal with the Japanese, who agreed to "voluntarily" limit the number of cars they sent over here.

With the quotas in effect, U.S. automakers were able to charge a lot more for each unit. At the same time, the Japanese had no reason to keep their prices down. From 1980 to 1983, the price of the average imported car went up more than 40% and the price of the average domestic car went up nearly 30 percent.

At the same time, profits went through the roof. Last year American auto companies had profits of more than \$6 billion, almost a billion dollars more than in any previous year. This year they will make about \$10 billion.

The quotas did nothing to encourage modernization of the U.S. industry. Without intense competition from abroad, U.S. companies had less incentive to modernize. They are no more able to compete now than they were four years ago when the "two-or three-year" quota program began. And instead of using extra revenue to protect

jobs, the automakers did just the opposite; they decided to sell fewer cars at a higher profit on each car.

Meanwhile, Walter Mondale has endorsed a "domestic content" bill that would virtually ban foreign cars by requiring that up to 90% of each car be built in the U.S. Such a bill, if passed, would mean the end of the U.S. auto industry as we now know it. Already the average \$10,500 price for a new car is beyond the ability of many Americans to pay, and new price hikes would mean even fewer cars sold.

The United Auto Workers union -- whose members make an average of \$23 an hour in wages and benefits -- supports the quotas, claiming that the restrictions save 200,000 jobs. Even if that claim were valid (and few outside the union think it is), the consumer is being taxed at least \$25,000 for each job saved.

Instead of fighting for quotas to drive up the price of cars, the UAW should work to bring prices down. The U.S. auto industry became the greatest in the world by following Henry Ford's strategy: sell many cars at low prices, rather than a few cars at high prices. By agreeing to wage concessions in return for profit-sharing and by getting out of the way of plant modernization, the UAW can bring prices down, ensure the long-term health of the industry, and protect workers' jobs.

## American farmers grow highest quality foods

By John Sledge

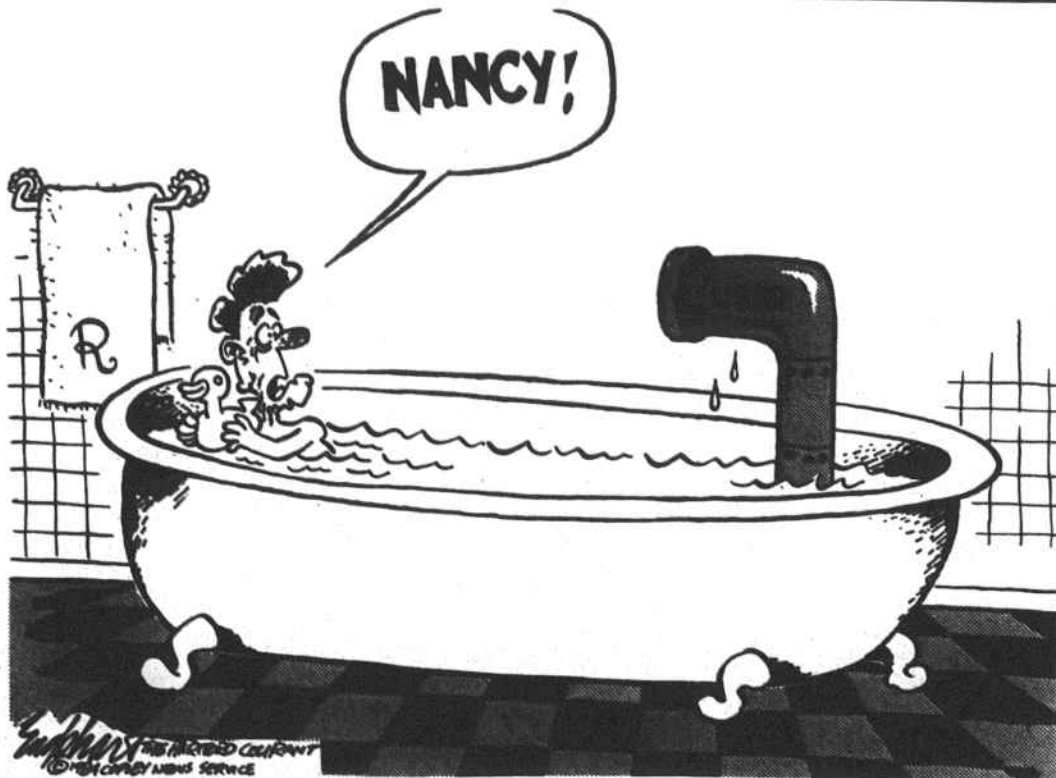
N.C. Farm Bureau Federation

The American farmer supplies this country -- as well as many other nations around the world -- with the highest quality food grown anywhere on earth. This abundance has been possible only because of the farmer's outstanding productive capacity and his

reliance upon the latest in technological advances.

Interest in better nutrition by people all over the world has put even more emphasis on high quality food during the past few years.

Farmers recognize their responsibility in meeting this challenge and are obviously succeeding in this direction. Farmers support policies and programs to assure consumers of wholesome products, to provide consumers with full product information, and to require new food products to meet the same quality and health requirements as existing food products.



## Hotel is aesthetic smorgasbord

By Lucien Coleman

The formal Japanese garden at the Hotel New Tagawa in Kitakyushu is a place of tranquil beauty. Not just pretty. It's an aesthetic smorgasbord. You can stand there for a few minutes and feel its quiet symmetry seep into your soul.

At breakfast, early one morning, I noticed a small hunched figure, an ancient woman dressed in gray smock and rubber boots, quietly toiling in a corner of the garden. She had been there the evening before, working in solitude, seemingly oblivious to passersby.

Later in the day, I went out to see what she was doing. And I was amazed. Using no tools other than her fingers, she was meticulously picking up fallen leaves and tiny twigs, carefully placing them in a yellow plastic bucket.

"Not much of a way to spend

### Things That Matter

your life," I thought, "just picking up twigs and leaves."

But, then, the truth dawned. This whole lovely garden was largely the result of that little woman's daily labor. Like a skilled artist, she was providing a tapestry of natural beauty for the hundreds of visitors who came to admire her handiwork.

"Not a bad way to spend your life," I thought, "caring for such a lovely garden."

That little Japanese lady taught me an important lesson. If we want to live in a world of beauty, somebody's got to pick up the twigs and leaves -- and the cigarette butts, candy wrappers, discarded paper cups, bottles, burger boxes, and the empty beer cans that threaten to turn our cities and roadways into a gargantuan trash heap.

Technological breakthroughs have a lot to do with our quality of life. But so do little things. Things like picking up the leaves and twigs.

### Letters Policy

Letters to the editor are encouraged and welcomed. Writers should keep letters as short as possible. Names, addresses and telephone numbers should be included and all letters must be signed. Names will be printed, however, other information will be kept confidential. We reserve the right to edit letters for good taste and brevity. Letters should be received by *The News-Journal* by noon on the Monday of the publication week.

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