

# SHOWROOM

## JOURNAL

### Congress under pressure as GM bankruptcy possible

by JOHN CRAWLEY  
Reuters

WASHINGTON—With General Motors Corp planning to end production of Saturns and Pontiacs at its Delaware plant which employs more than 1,000 people, state leaders are scrambling to win new work at the facility or persuade the company to move other operations to the region.

"This would appear on the surface to leave us in bleak circumstances," US Sen. Thomas Carper, a Democrat and former governor who helped save the 62-year-old Wilmington plant from closure in the early 1990s, said.

"We're encouraging them not to close the plant. At some point, GM will need more capacity," Carper told Reuters in an interview.

Carper's interview and other recent interviews with government officials, lobbyists and economists precede a June 1 deadline for GM to show a White House/Treasury task force overseeing industry restructuring that it can be viable on its own.

Failure to satisfy the task force would trigger bankruptcy where GM could try to finalize concessions. It is seeking givebacks from debtholders and the United

Auto Workers and wants to slash its network of 6,000 dealers. GM plans to cut 21,000 factory jobs.

Lawmakers deferred to the task force as smaller Chrysler spiraled into bankruptcy. But there has been a broader political response to GM in the past week since a second bankruptcy would compound Detroit's uncertainty and likely radiate economic anxiety beyond the industry's Midwest core.

#### GM a bellwether

Autos has one of the heaviest economic multipliers of any US industry. For every job loss in auto assembly, another nine disappear elsewhere, Mark Zandi, chief economist and co-founder of Moody's Economy.com, has told Congress.

GM employs 88,000 factory and salaried workers in the United States. It has also been a bellwether for industries like steel, plastics, warehousing, software, healthcare, trucking and makers of glossy paper for car catalogs.

Michigan State University economist Charles Ballard believes GM's reach is vast enough to affect US GDP "if the whole thing were to implode," which he believes is remote.

Still, the possibility of bankruptcy is rattling Washington, which has extended GM \$15.4 billion since January. The Treasury likely will be on the hook for more GM financing before month's end as well as in any court restructuring.

GM's restructuring would wipe out half the current debt to taxpayers.

Lawmakers are under pressure from constituents and interest groups like labor, car dealers, and suppliers to intervene as the Obama administration reviews the GM business plan and prepares the company for a possible bankruptcy filing.

Dealers pressed Congress on Wednesday over plans driven by the task force for automakers to slash their networks. GM and Chrysler plan to cut up to 3,000 sales outlets, according to people



briefed on the developing plans.

More than 100 members of the National Automobile Dealers Association (NADA) asked House and Senate lawmakers to urge the task force to slow dealer downsizing.

In meetings last week on Capitol Hill, GM Chief Executive Fritz Henderson fielded concerns of lawmakers from the primary auto

states of Michigan, Ohio and Indiana. He also met with officials from Missouri, California, New York, Minnesota, Texas, Georgia, Illinois and Colorado.

#### Options discussed

Carper said he suggested to GM North American operations chief Troy Clarke that the company locate research work on batteries and other technologies

to the mid-Atlantic.

Creating a business center close to Washington where key funding and other decisions on advanced technology programs will be made in coming years would make sense for Detroit, Carper said, noting that GM, Chrysler and Ford Motor Co have lost political clout as they have contracted. ■

### 5 cheap tech items for summer car trips

With these inexpensive gizmos, there's no reason to dread the open road

NEW YORK—Dreading long car trips this summer? Here are five inexpensive things to help keep the peace in the car and make the journey more interesting:

#### POIFriend

Jazz up your GPS unit with lists of extra Points of Interest you can download for free. For instance, you can load the locations of all the restaurants featured in the "Diners, Drive-ins and Dives" show on the Food Network, and all US Wal-Mart and Starbucks locations. It's a bit cumbersome — you have to download the files to your computer, then transfer them to the GPS unit either via cable or a memory card.

#### FM transmitter

Stream music from your MP3 player to the car radio with this simple add-on. Sound quality is not as good as you'll get when connecting to the stereo with a wire, but in a rental car, you may not have an alternative. If there's a cassette deck, you can use a cassette adapter instead, for slightly better sound.

Price: \$20-\$30

#### iPhone and iPod Touch apps for toddlers

Distract a young child for a while with *Spawn*, where firework-light streamers of light react to the user's touch. *Bubbles* lets you drag across the screen to create bubbles, then pop them with a touch. *Preschool Music* lets a toddler tap out tunes on the screen. Headphones might be in order to spare the rest of the car.

Price: \$1 per app.

#### Rechargeable external battery pack

Cigarette-lighter adapters are a life-saver when it comes to keeping electronics running, but there's only one outlet for a family's dozen gadgets. Get a rechargeable battery pack to power iPods, phones and game devices in the back seat. The crucial figure to look for is the pack's capacity, expressed in milliampere-hours. Some cheap ones have only 500 mAh capacity, half as much as the average cell-phone battery. Bigger ones have more than 3000 mAh, enough for three full charges of a cell phone.

Price: \$15-\$50.

#### Fresh games for the Nintendo DS

*Pokemon Platinum* is the latest and well-reviewed installment of a long-running series that requires thought and strategy. *Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Echoes of Time* has a cooperative multiplayer mode, so siblings can settle their differences and work together to overcome the game, but each one will need a DS and a copy of the game.

Price: \$35-40. (AP)

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