

Letter to the Editor, The New York Times, 490 words

June 2, 2006

Editor:

I'm tremendously disappointed with Thomas L. Friedman's May 31 column, *A Quick Fix for the Gas Addicts*. Mr. Friedman often offers well-supported, rational perspectives on the issues. This column was neither well-supported, nor rational.

He wildly asserts that GM is "dangerous to America's future" and is "like a crack dealer" addicting Americans to SUVs. He accuses American automakers of buying congressional votes, and suggests America would be better off if Toyota were to take over GM.

What rubbish.

Here are the facts: GM offers more vehicles that get an EPA-estimated 30 mpg or higher on the highway than any other automaker. That includes 2005's top-selling economy car, the Chevy Aveo.

GM also offers nine E85-capable vehicles – with more than 1.9 million already on the road – that can significantly reduce oil consumption, and we're working with others to expand E85 distribution nationwide. Toyota has none.

Our Saturn VUE Green Line hybrid, available soon, will feature the industry's best SUV highway mileage at a price well below those of competing hybrids. Our sophisticated two-mode hybrid system launches next year on our full-size SUVs.

In 38 cities across this nation and Canada, there are 449 GM hybrid buses saving thousands of gallons of fuel every week. Meanwhile, we continue to invest heavily to develop hydrogen fuel cell-powered vehicles that promise to take the automobile out of the oil and environmental debate once and for all.

Mr. Friedman views a limited promotion, offering a credit on fuel purchases on certain cars and SUVs in two states, as a sinister effort to turn unsuspecting Americans into fuel "addicts." Does he really think this promotion will persuade someone in the market for a \$15,000 small car to instead choose a \$35,000 SUV?

Incidentally, Toyota also makes a full range of SUVs, including three full-size models that get worse mileage than GM's full-size SUVs. Toyota's also opening a large plant in Texas to build a big, V8-powered pickup. Most of Toyota's U.S. growth in the past decade has come from its expanding sales of trucks and SUVs, not from the sale of imported hybrids. Toyota is a strong company, in part because it offers a wide range of cars and trucks to serve all their customers – just like GM has done for nearly a century.

Finally, the Big Three collectively spend less lobbying in Washington than most other large companies. GM has 138,000 U.S. employees, and there are millions of

Americans whose livelihoods directly or indirectly depend on GM's success. It is important that their voice be heard in Washington. But we don't "buy votes." For The New York Times to say so is irresponsible.

Mr. Friedman's GM is not the GM I know. I invite him to Detroit so he can learn the facts and get to know the company first hand. What do you say, Tom?

Steven J. Harris
Vice President, Global Communications
General Motors Corp.
Detroit