Give Me Something To Believe In

By Anna Wells, Editor, IMPO

As editors in the manufacturing realm, we hear a lot of complaints from readers about government policy ... Cash for Clunkers being the most recent to ignite a storm of controversy on our web pages and in our inboxes.

The program and its execution had it's flaws — I'll concede that — but the problem I had with the feedback was how much of it was a cynical projection of results. There were a lot of folks out there who saw the program in such a negative light before it even got off the ground that they were disinclined to see any of the positive effects — such as improved profits for Ford, increased production for GM, and the continuing financial autonomy of hundreds of American dealerships.

Recently the Obama administration has been discussing the prospect of elevating Ron Bloom, head of the government's auto task force, to a job that would set a more broad policy relating to U.S. manufacturing. This "manufacturing czar" will be in a position designed to place more emphasis on American industrial policy including reviewing U.S. competitiveness in the global economy, as well as relate to trade, taxes and other economic issues.

The tirades are already peppering a few blogs in response to "yet another Obama Administration Czar," but I'd like to think it's at least a move forward in the effort towards what we've been asking for over the past two years as industry has slipped further away from us.

Yeah, things have been tough, but I'd hate to think we've become so disenfranchised with the higher-ups that any effort towards change is viewed as superficial pandering that's doomed to fail. Worse — after rampant corruption has further tarnished the vision many Americans have of executive level leaders — big ideas sound like bigger wastes of money, and that the small-town hard-working American is the one to bear the brunt of the effects of its failure.

But if we truly do see innovation as the way forward, then we can't be trapped under the weight of our fears. Sure, the burden of proof is on the policy, but where will we get if we don't ever have the courage to get something off the ground?

It's almost to the point where we want something tried and tested before we are willing to give it a chance — morphing into this strange cyclical problem of stunted innovation: how do I know it works unless someone invents it first, proves and tests it? But who are these innovators if we're all too jaded over "claims" to embrace anything new?

I'd ask all of you, with all due respect, to temper your criticism in favor of a little optimism towards what we might be able to do here. Political persuasion aside, this country needs a strong industrial policy, and it needs its manufacturers, more than anyone, to get behind it. Obama is asking for your support, NAM and Manufacturer's Alliance/MAPI are, and so am I.
What are your thoughts? E-mail me at anna.wells@advantagemedia.com [1].

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