

WALT KOWALSKI TO SPEAK AT THE RNC?

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Remember this ad? It played during the Super Bowl, Chrysler's second great Super Bowl ad in a row. When it played, Republicans immediately accused Chrysler of running the ad as a sop to Obama for bailing the company out. Karl Rove blasted the ad.

I was, frankly, offended by it.

I'm a huge fan of Clint Eastwood, I thought it was an extremely well-done ad, but it is a sign of what happens when you have Chicago-style politics, and the President of the United States and his political minions are, in essence, using our tax dollars to buy corporate advertising and the best-wishes of the management which is benefited by getting a bunch of our money that they'll never pay back.

Which makes the buzz—that Clint Eastwood appears to be Mitt's surprise speaker tonight—all that more interesting.

A lot of people are talking about what an odd choice, ideologically, Eastwood is for the radicals that make up today's GOP. He supports gay rights; Mitt's Church bankrolled opposing them. He's socially liberal; they're not. He thinks climate change is serious; they think petroleum profits are.

But I'm most interested in the possibility that Eastwood is the big secret because of what I noted when the ad ran in February. The logic behind having Eastwood star in a Chrysler ad about Detroit is not Dirty Harry, but rather Walt Kowalski, the grouchy old former auto worker from Eastwood's *Gran Torino*. And that Clint Eastwood character is actually a great fit

for today's GOP: At the start of the movie, it would not have been out of character for Kowalski to throw peanuts at an African American woman as he bitched about "gooks" and Jews. Over the course of the movie, he comes to realize the Hmongs who have moved into his neighborhood are just as much a part of America as he is.

Walt Kowalski, like a lot of Republicans, was an old white dude struggling to cope with the increasing diversity of his world.

But then there's the other reason I find it appropriate. I described in February how Walt Kowalski came to symbolize Detroit only because of government investment.

Gran Torino, that tale of troubled old America coming into conflict with, and learning to love, the future of America, was shot in Detroit rather than the Twin Cities because of government intervention. The film was shot during the period when film credits offered under Jennifer Granholm and cut under Rick Snyder brought lots of new, creative jobs to MI; it was one of the first big films to be shot using the credits. Walt Kowalski was a native Detroiter only because MI invested in making him one.

And so Clint Eastwood, that Bay Area native who told a story about the Twin Cities but set it in Detroit, generalized the Detroit-specific ad about resilience from last year. But both the invocation of the Chrysler bailout and the use of Eastwood remind that rebounds work best when governments invest.

Which would make Clint Eastwood, playing the Walt Kowalski he performed for Chrysler in February, just like so many other speakers at the RNC, bragging of their self-reliance while bitching they're not getting enough government

teat.

Don't get me wrong. If Eastwood speaks and gives the same kind of speech he gave in that Chrysler ad, he'll be a tremendously effective speech for the GOP (which is why so many of them complained about the Chrysler ad in February).

But underlying it all is the same logic that underlies Mitt Romney: an almost visceral denial of all the government benefits he has exploited, coupled with efforts to avoid giving back for those benefits in the form of taxes.