

CONGRESS REVIEWS THE TAXPAYERS' INVESTMENT

One of the biggest stories at the North American International Auto Show yesterday was not the cars, but the congressional delegation – led by Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Majority Leader Steny Hoyer – that came to the show. In addition to Pelosi and Hoyer, much of Michigan's delegation (the only Republican was Fred Upton, though Candice Miller had intended to attend before bad roads got in the way), Ohio Representatives Tim Ryan and Betty Sutton, and Senators Byron Dorgan and Tom Carper attended the show. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood and Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis were there, too; and until last Thursday, Obama was planning to attend (until the Secret Service decided it would be a security nightmare).

In other words, there was a big presence of DC bigwigs at the auto show. As Pelosi, in particular, worked her way from the General Motors' display (she got a close look at the Volt) to the Chrysler to the Ford one (she checked out the new Focus), the media followed along in a big pack, filming her chatting with the CEOs of America's (and, in the case of GM and Chrysler, the taxpayers') auto companies. In the YouTube above, she and Hoyer are talking to Ford CEO Alan Mulally.

The crowds and media attention their presence brought tells you something – that DC has been far too distant from America's industrial base for far too long.

Indeed, some of the DC-MI folks I spoke to pointed out to me that the US car companies have not done a good job at reaching out to the press in recent years, and nor has DC shown much interest in exchange. The hope was that yesterday's visit may begin to change all that. (I know GM plans a series of Volt test drives

for politicians at the DC auto show later this month.)

And, at the very least, Pelosi has promised to come back next year.

Speaking to those close to the delegation, it sounds like one of the most productive parts of the day was a lunch some of the DC bigwigs had with some local representatives of energy companies: Dow Kokam, Johnson-Saft Power, and Dowding Machining. In addition to talking to about innovation going on here in MI, they talked about the kind of support they need to continue and grow such efforts. That's the kind of conversation – rather than just a pitch from a CEO standing in front of a shiny car—that we need to see more of.

Here's a YouTube from the press conference Pelosi did at the end of the day. And here are the comments John Dingell and Fred Upton made at the same press conference.