

Romney Versus the Automakers

EDITORIAL

When General Motors tells a presidential campaign that it is engaging in “cynical campaign politics at its worst,” that’s a pretty good signal that the campaign has crossed a red line and ought to pull back. Not Mitt Romney’s campaign. Having broadcast an outrageously deceitful ad attacking the auto bailout, the campaign ignored the howls from carmakers and came back with more.

Mr. Romney apparently plans to end his race as he began it: playing lowest-common-denominator politics, saying anything necessary to achieve power and blithely deceiving voters desperate for clarity and truth.

This started months ago when he realized that his [very public 2008 stance against the successful and wildly popular government bailout of GM](#) and Chrysler was hurting him in the valuable states of Ohio and Michigan. In February, he wrote [an essay for The Detroit News](#) calling the bailout “crony capitalism on a grand scale” because unions benefited and insisting that Detroit would have been better off to refuse federal money. (This ignores [the well-documented reality](#) that there was no other cash available to the carmakers.)

When that tactic didn’t work, he began insisting at the debates that his plan for Detroit wasn’t really that different from President Obama’s. (Except for the niggling detail of the \$80 billion federal investment.)

That was quickly discredited, so Mr. Romney began telling rallies last week that Chrysler was considering moving its production to China. Chrysler loudly denounced it as “fantasies,” saying it was only considering increasing production in China for sale in China, without moving a single American job.

“I feel obliged to unambiguously restate our position: Jeep production will not be moved from the United States to China,” Chrysler’s chief executive, [Sergio Marchionne, said in a statement](#). “Jeep assembly lines will remain in operation in the United States and will constitute the backbone of the brand. It is inaccurate to suggest anything different.” In fact, 1,100 new jobs will be added in Toledo to produce a new generation of Jeep.

The Romney campaign ignored the company, following up with [an instantly notorious ad](#) saying President Obama “sold Chrysler to Italians who are going to build Jeeps in China.” If the false implication wasn’t clear enough, the campaign put [out a radio ad on Tuesday](#) saying “Barack Obama says he saved the auto industry. But for who? Ohio or China?” What happened, the ad asks, “to the promises made to autoworkers in Toledo and throughout Ohio?”

What happened was that those promises were kept. Nearly 1.5 million people are working as a direct result of the bailout. Ohio's unemployment rate is well below the national average. ■■■'s American sales continue to increase, and [Chrysler said this week](#) that its third-quarter net income rose 80 percent. These companies haven't just bounced back from the bottom; they are accelerating.

What Mr. Romney cannot admit is that all this is a direct result of the government investment he would have rejected. It's bad enough to be wrong on the policy. It takes an especially dishonest candidate to simply turn up the volume on a lie and keep repeating it.

By doing that in a flailing, last-minute grab for Ohio, Mr. Romney is providing a grim preview of what kind of president he would be.
