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Sample Op-Ed

An Open Letter to New Ford CEO Allan Mulally

Dear Mr. Mulally,

Congratulations on your new position at the helm of Ford Motor Company, America's most iconic yet troubled automaker. Though the job ahead will be challenging, it will also provide you with the unparalleled opportunity to end Ford's downward spiral of oil addiction and lead the company into a new age of heightened fuel economy and environmental responsibility.

First, let's take stock of the company you now run. Environmental and human rights advocates have long labeled Ford "America's worst oil addict." In recent years, credit rating agencies, banks and the stock market have all linked Ford's poor economic performance to its over-reliance on gas guzzling cars, trucks and SUVs. When Moody's Investors Service again downgraded Ford's financial outlook in July, it reflected the expectation that Ford will face even more troubles due to "high fuel prices and the resulting shift in consumer preference away from the very profitable SUV segment."

As gas prices reach all time highs, Ford's sales of oil-addicted vehicles continue to plummet. When the US invaded oil-rich Iraq, anti-war activists asked Ford to build more fuel efficient cars. When, in 2005, dozens died in Nigeria – the world's eighth largest oil exporter – human rights experts asked Ford to offer fewer oil-addicted vehicles. When Hurricane Katrina ravaged the Gulf Coast last fall, displaced residents asked Ford to stop building vehicles that fuel global warming.

Today, Ford is a company on the verge of collapse: 35,000 workers have been laid off, four plant closures announced, and 75,000 worker buyouts now on the table. All because Ford's business strategists claim they did not foresee rising gas prices. Mr. Mulally, we hope these savvy prognosticators will follow your predecessor out the door. While these "strategists" failed to provide any vision for Ford, we expect more from you.

We wish you the best as you shoulder the responsibility of engineering Ford's turnaround. Your company may have missed opportunities in the past, but you have a chance to change all that by building cars that Americans want. With more than three in four Americans considering a hybrid for their next car purchase, Ford should be fighting to ensure that its hybrid market share climbs above its meager two percent.

Ford's future is clearly tied to breaking its oil addiction. Like many addicts, Ford has spent years in denial. Mr. Mulally, you can change the culture at Ford, and

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along with it, the company's prospects for the 21st Century. We urge you to transcend and transform the legacy of your predecessor. Where he broke promises, you can deliver on them. Where he failed to advance innovative technologies, you can embrace Ford's vast potential. Using existing technologies such as plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs), Ford could lead the auto industry in fuel efficiency.

Just this week, AutoNation – the nation's largest seller of new Ford vehicles – wrote in an op-ed that American consumers “crave” PHEVs and that it looks forward to selling these gas-optional vehicles. Where is Ford's commitment to the vehicles its dealers want to sell? Will dealers have to look to organizations like Google.org, which this week announced it will develop a PHEV?

Your predecessor promised bold moves but failed to deliver. Mr. Mulally, you can keep Ford's broken promises by making a commitment to lead the big-six in fuel-economy standards. This may very well be the key to preserving a future for Ford and its workers. Seize this opportunity and lead Ford into a new era of financial prosperity and environmental stewardship. As Ford can no longer ignore, the two go hand in hand.

Sincerely,

Michael Brune
Executive Director,
The Rainforest Action Network

Kirsten Moller
Executive Director,
Global Exchange

Comprised of Rainforest Action Network, Global Exchange and the Ruckus Society, the Jumpstart Ford Campaign is working to end America's oil addiction.