



P E R S P E C T I V E S

by **Rinaldo S. Brutoco**

Rinaldo S. Brutoco is the Founding President and CEO of the Santa Barbara-based World Business Academy and co-founder of JUST Capital. He's a serial entrepreneur, executive, author, radio host, and futurist who's published on the role of business in relation to pressing moral, environmental, and social concerns for over 35 years.



What's With Toyota

Corporate responsibility is not optional

The “Sedition Caucus” is defined as those members of the House of Representatives who, after the January 6th riots were brought to a halt, voted to stop counting Electoral College votes in the hopes of overturning the 2020 presidential election.

Counting these Electoral Ballots is the final legal act prior to initiating the “Peaceful Transfer of Power” from one presidential administration to another. Modeled by George Washington himself, the peaceful transition of power has been one of the cornerstone political features of American Democracy. What happened on January 6th was an attempt by many thousands of Trump motivated insurrectionists to stop the wheels of government and prevent the peaceful transition of power.

“A violent uprising against an authority or government” is the dictionary definition of Sedition. When you add on that the purpose of the seditious acts are to stop a legitimate and necessary function of government, it becomes treason. To mollify anyone who thinks this is hyperbole, the technical definition of treason is “the crime of betraying one’s country...especially by attempting to overthrow the government (emphasis supplied).” Without a doubt, overthrowing the normal democratic process of that peaceful transfer of power was specifically intended to keep then President Trump in power despite his loss at the ballot box.

We’ve all seen the videos and are horrified at how close the insurrectionists came to achieving the goal of this violent form of treason. How any Member of the House, after such a treasonous insurrection, could vote to invalidate the Electoral College vote count—thereby supporting the specific goal of the insurrection shocks me. Nothing more needs to be said about what happened. What does require a serious examination, however, is which individuals, including members of the mob, Members of Congress, and others who did, or continue to, support the failed insurrection. That’s where Toyota comes in.

Last week it was discovered that, by a wide margin, the largest financial backer of the Sedition Caucus has been Toyota. They donated almost three times as much as the infamous Koch brothers to House Members of the Sedition Caucus. They’ve doled out substantial contributions to 37 Insurrectionist Congressmen, including \$5,000 to Randy Biggs (R-Ariz.) who THE WEEK reported to be “one of the most vocal election conspiracy theorists and an alleged organizer of the January 6th ‘Stop the Steal’ rally.” Even more disturbing: Toyota chose to “double down” when this appalling fact was reported. A Toyota spokesperson sent this written statement to the news organization Axios: “We do not believe it is appropriate to judge members of Congress solely based on their votes on the electoral certification.” What??? Voting to overturn the legitimate national election to prevent the peaceful transfer of power is not just any political vote. It was a vote in support of insurrectionist treason. Toyota is not free to dismiss such an egregious act by in any way equating it to normal political process.

We cannot, and we will not, permit Toyota to get away with such a blatant disregard of our American political system. There is a price they must pay and many of us will do all in our power to see that they do pay—with lost sales and profits, for putting their desire for profit over their moral responsibility to serve the best interests of the societies they sell to.

Unfortunately, this is not the first Toyota “breach of faith” those of us in California have witnessed. When Trump took office, he tried to reverse the Obama Administration’s goal for five percent annual increase in fuel efficiency by reducing this target to just 1.5 percent per year. California refused to allow cars made in the state to meet such meager gains in fuel economy, and (along with the 19 other states that follow its lead on fuel efficiency) continued to target the five percent per year goals. That created a dramatic split in the automobile industry.

In July of 2019, several automotive companies (Ford Motor Co, Honda, VW and BMW) reached a voluntary agreement to increase fuel efficiency to a compromise of 3.7 percent more fuel efficiency each year. Toyota, on the other hand, chose to join a lawsuit with the Trump Administration against California. Only just in February, when the handwriting was on the wall that the suit would die with the Trump Administration itself, did Toyota agree to drop their case. Why, you might ask, was Toyota being so cavalier with its relationship to California residents? It turns out that Toyota actually experienced a reduction in its average fuel economy between 2012 and 2017 (even with the PRIUS averaged in!) as it continued to “up sell” us on larger, heavier, more expensive cars.

This blatant pursuit of profit, over the quality of the very air we breathe, was all Toyota could think about. Sorry, Toyota but that won’t do.

I drove a leased Toyota Mirai for three years. It’s probably the most advanced commercially available hydrogen car in the world, and I love hydrogen cars! I waited until after the suit against California was dropped in February, but then began my new car search. I was on the phone agreeing to take a new Mirai the day the information came out describing Toyota’s explanation of their “donations.” I immediately called the agent at the dealer and told them that I would be boycotting Toyota products and cancelled my order, following this up with a letter expressing my outrage. Until they develop a sense of civic responsibility this will be my position. Now I’m getting a hydrogen fuel cell electric Hyundai NEXO. I hope others will similarly express their disapproval of Toyota and refrain from buying their products until the company gets clear about its responsibility to society as a higher objective than maximizing profits alone.

Given the numerous crises we face as a state, a nation and as a global population, there is no choice. The most powerful institution in the world today is business. At a time when climate change is destabilizing our civilization, and political institutions are being challenged as never before, there is no other option for business but to begin “Taking Responsibility for the Whole” of society. That’s been the World Business Academy’s motto of since its inception in 1986. The very survival of human civilization, as we know it, demands a new understanding of, and commitment to, corporate responsibility—there literally is no other option.

Published in the 07/08/2021 edition of the Montecito Journal