One footnote to yesterday's historic announcement by President Obama on national climate change policy: in signaling that the federal government will reverse course and support California's pioneering efforts to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from vehicular sources, the role of the American auto industry in this debate deserves renewed scrutiny.

Since 2002, domestic automakers have worked tirelessly in the federal courts, Executive Branch and in Congress to block California's GHG emission standards from taking effect. And they've spent literally millions of dollars on lawyers and lobbyists in the process.

Late last year, the American auto industry beat a path to Capitol Hill in their successful efforts to seek a financial bailout from the federal government. Some members of Congress quite correctly demanded that as a condition of any such bailout, the automakers cease their legal efforts to block the California GHG emission standards from being implemented. Late last year, however, the Bush Administration threatened to veto the auto industry bailout legislation if that condition were attached, and the idea was scrapped.

Now would be a good time to revisit that issue. It's bad enough that Detroit has seen fit in recent years to delay, block and prevaricate when it comes to such urgent issues as climate change and alternative energy. But it is the height of folly to require American taxpayers to finance such short-sighted and counterproductive company policies.

If domestic automakers insist on continuing to be part of the climate change problem rather than the solution, the American public shouldn't have to subsidize their irresponsible corporate behavior.