

GM, Ford and Chrysler chiefs criticised for taking jets to bail-out hearing

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Chief executives at America's three biggest motor companies have been criticised by US congressmen for flying private jets to Washington to request assistance from the taxpayer

Alan Mulally of Ford, Robert Nardelli of Chrysler and Richard Wagoner of General Motors, flew privately to the US capital yesterday in a bid to secure a \$25bn (£17m) loan package for the ailing car industry.

Politicians at the House Financial Services Committee expressed concern that the executives had used jets at a time when the companies were desperate to preserve cash.

Republican Gary Ackerman, a Democrat from New York, likened the move to "seeing a guy show up at the soup kitchen in a high hat and tuxedo". He added: "Couldn't you have downgraded to first class or something, or jet-pooled or something to get here?"

"I don't know how I go back to my constituents and say the auto industry has changed if they own private jets which are not only expensive to own, expensive to operate and expensive to fly here, rather than to have flown commercial," continued Rep. Brad Sherman, a Californian Democrat.

GM chief Rick Wagoner and Ford chief Alan Mulally are required by their companies to fly by private aircraft for security reasons, according to company documents filed with the U S Securities and Exchange Commission, Reuters reported. The policy for Chrysler CEO Robert Nardelli is not required to be disclosed because the company is not publicly traded.

Later yesterday, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid reversed plans to hold a test vote on the bail-out measure. An aide told CNN that Reid had decided to cancel the test vote when it became clear the measure would fall well short of the 60 votes needed.

He did, however, start a procedural move that could allow a vote on a compromise. Several senators from auto-producing states began working on this yesterday.

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