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Opening Statement

Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member

Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

Subcommittee on Regulatory Affairs, Stimulus Oversight and Government Spending

Hearing on “Volt Vehicle Fire: What Did NHTSA Know and When Did They Know It?”

January 25, 2012

Good morning. The Chevy Volt is a significant technological achievement that will save consumers millions of dollars, significantly help the environment, and reduce our nation's dependence on foreign oil. Unfortunately, some people apparently believe that if the Obama Administration supports something, they must oppose it. But that would be senseless.

The rest of the world is moving forward on cutting-edge battery and fuel cell technologies. If we do not aggressively support the electric car market here in the United States, we will be buying the cars of the future from Asia and Europe, just like we are buying oil overseas today.

The title of today's hearing is, “What did NHTSA Know about the Volt Vehicle Fire and When Did They Know It?” As both GM and NHTSA will explain, the battery fire that occurred in June 2011 was a very rare occurrence that was extremely difficult to replicate. No Volt owner has experienced a similar accident, and GM has already taken steps to improve its battery technology to prevent extreme incidents like this one from occurring in the future.

NHTSA recently closed its investigation of the Volt, declaring it safe, without issuing a recall. In fact, we will hear expert testimony today that with respect to fire risk, electric vehicles are far safer than gasoline-fueled vehicles.

I do not believe today's hearing is based on an interest in protecting consumers. I think it is part of an effort to attack the Obama Administration for supporting GM and the electric car industry, an industry the Obama Administration helped save from oblivion.

The majority asserts that NHTSA deliberately suppressed public knowledge of the Volt battery fire for political gain, yet we have seen no evidence for the majority's theory.

I would like to commend GM for doing what seemed impossible a few short years ago. The Obama Administration gave GM the opportunity to revive its business, but it was GM that

took the reins and implemented serious changes. Last week, it was announced that just two years after filing for bankruptcy, GM has now reclaimed the top spot on the list of top-selling automakers.

GM represents a true success story in American manufacturing, and I am glad to see they have been able to improve their products and save thousands of American jobs in the process.

I thank all of the witnesses for their attendance here this morning, and I look forward to their testimony.

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