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**Statement by the Honorable Bobby L. Rush, Chairman**

Energy and Commerce Committee Subcommittee on  
Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection

**Legislative Hearing: “Auto Safety: Current Mandates and Emerging Issues”**

May 18, 2009

WASHINGTON, D.C. — “The subcommittee will come to order.

“Today the Subcommittee will conduct its first oversight hearing of the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration, or NHTSA, in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress.

“The intent of today’s hearing is fairly simple. I want to know if NHTSA is taking the necessary, proactive steps to ensure that American consumers are as safe as they can reasonably be in their personal, commercial, and recreational vehicles. Whether it is a parent driving his or her children to school, a motor-coach full of children traveling to the museum, or simply driving to work, Americans everyday put their faith in the safety of the cars and trucks they drive. It is of absolute importance that manufacturers and government regulators meet this basic expectation.

“With this over-arching goal in mind, there are several issues that I want to explore in this hearing that specifically implicate safety.

“First, is NHTSA issuing safety rules that are relevant and timely? Is the agency sufficiently heeding the recommendations of the National Transportation Safety Board and responding to findings that point to dangerous problems? In this regard, I am very interested to know how NHTSA has responded to recommendations from NTSB on issues surrounding tire pressure monitoring, tire retread standards, and Electronic On-Board Recorders for commercial vehicles, as well as the overall safety of motor-coach vehicles.

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“Second, is NHTSA sufficiently implementing Congressional intent? In 2005, Congress mandated that NHTSA establish standards reducing rollover crashes and mitigating the resulting damages. Congress also called on NHTSA to study “dynamic testing” that duplicates the forces at work in a real rollover crash. I want to know where the agency is in meeting this Congressional mandate.

“Third, I’d like to know what steps NHTSA is taking to meet the unique challenges of safety for hybrid and alternative fuel vehicles, which are quickly becoming a significant segment of cars driven by Americans. If we are going to promote these vehicles to American consumers in our efforts to further energy independence and combat global climate change, we have to also assure Americans that they are as safe as conventional vehicles in order to foster their long-term commercial viability.

“Fourth, I am interested to know what special steps NHTSA is taking to ensure child safety in vehicles. The Chicago Tribune recently ran a story citing the poor performance of child car seats, and the Secretary of Transportation, my friend and former Congressman from Illinois, Ray LaHood, has ordered a comprehensive review of the car seat safety program. Moreover, I want to know what initiatives, if any, NHTSA is taking with regard to rear seat-belt reminders and safety features that notify the driver that a child is present in the back seat of a car.

“Lastly, I want to know if NHTSA has the sufficient resources to meet the unique challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the changes occurring in American transportation.

“I take this subcommittee’s jurisdiction over NHTSA and vehicle safety very seriously. I very much believe it is possible – indeed necessary – to promote energy independence, fight climate change, AND ensure safety AND nurture the long-term success of American-made cars and trucks. This Subcommittee has an important role to play in furthering these goals, and they are not mutually exclusive concepts.

“I want to thank the witnesses appearing before us today, and I think I speak for all of the members of this subcommittee that we look forward to working with the Obama Administration, Acting Deputy Administrator Medford, and the future full-time Administrator of NHTSA, whoever that may be, on matters affecting vehicle safety.

“With that, I yield back the balance of my time.”

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