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## Commentary: Detroit 3 must come clean on getting green

*DAN BECKER AND JAMES GERSTENZANG*

As part of their turnaround plans, General Motors and Chrysler delivered bold promises: Clean cars, clean fuels and more hybrids.

But the Obama administration found the plans lacking and sent the two automakers back to the drawing boards. This leads to the questions.

GM and Chrysler clearly put Michigan's future at risk by blowing smoke about what they are doing.

Consumers and Washington officials want to make sure that we get something concrete for our money. The companies should be playing it straight.

But on clean cars, clean fuels and more hybrids, they are saying one thing and delivering another: Is it just another bait and switch?

Consider Chevrolet's you-can-get-there-from-here-on-electricity Volt hybrid, E85 ethanol and the advertising focus on highway fuel economy ratings.

GM tells Washington and Wall Street that the Volt represents the future -- the salvation of the company and the climate. Perhaps.

But not if they make 10,000 the first year and no more than 50,000 when production ramps up. Compare that with the 500,000 Silverado and Sierra pickups GM produces annually.

And the Obama auto task force says GM is at least one generation behind Toyota on advanced green hybrid powertrain technology.

The auto companies love to talk about the number of E85-capable vehicles they produce. Question: Have you had any luck finding a filling station that will sell you biofuel?

There are "nearly 1,900" filling stations across the country selling E85, according to E85Vehicles.com. But there are 157,000 that don't. Better fill up at the next station you find.

Through a loophole, producing E85 vehicles allows the companies to get around rules limiting how many gas guzzlers they can make. The Bush administration estimated that this loophole increases our gas consumption by as much as 3 billion gallons a year.

Each of the Detroit Three -- we'll throw Ford Motor Co. into this mix, even though it is not seeking government assistance -- touts the number of cars it produces with fuel economy greater than 30 miles per gallon.

They are talking about highway mileage. That's misleading. How do they do in combined city-highway driving that is closer to American driving reality?

The Environmental Protection Agency rates the 2009 Chevrolet Malibu 2.4L automatic at 30 miles per gallon on the highway -- but the combined city-highway mileage is 25 miles per gallon. The 30 mpg highway rating of the Chrysler Sebring 2.4L automatic drops to 24 mpg in the real-life city-highway test.

To be sure, no one is selling many cars and trucks -- and with gas at \$2 a gallon, that includes hybrids. But do you really think gas will remain this "cheap"?

Japanese manufacturers, who make most of the hybrids sold in the United States, are boosting production and marketing. But while the Detroit Three plan to make more hybrid models, it is unclear how many actual vehicles they will build. As with the Volt, the plan sounds good. Show us the numbers.

After Rick Wagoner, GM needs a CEO with the vision to see that the road ahead needs cleaner, more efficient cars to cut global warming pollution, oil addiction and to make the company competitive.

To get more money from Washington, the Detroit Three automakers must first persuade taxpayers that they are prepared to correct past mistakes -- and provide equity for more billions of dollars.

That means making vehicles that don't guzzle and don't pollute. This is auto mechanics, not rocket science. GM, Chrysler and Ford can do it. For Michigan's sake, they must.