

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS  
**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
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Opening Statement of Representative Darrell Issa, Ranking Member  
House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
Hearing Entitled “Toyota Gas Pedals: Is the Public at Risk?”  
February 24, 2010

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding today’s hearing about a serious breakdown in the efforts of Toyota and the Department of Transportation to protect consumers and to provide timely and accurate information about Toyota’s recalls.

Without question, advances in automotive technology, particularly electronic safety advances including anti-lock brakes, electronic stability control, and air bag sensors have made cars on the road today safer than ever before. American consumers certainly don’t want to take a step backward away from technological advances. What they want is to know that regulators and manufacturers have effective strategies in place to quickly diagnose and fix problems in both newer and older technology systems after warning signs appear.

This hearing is a fact- finding effort to get answers for the American people. It is *not* an ideologically-driven hearing designed to punish Toyota- or any auto-manufacturer for that matter.

The only interests that matter today, Mr. Chairman, are the interests of the American driving public.

There are several questions that this hearing will help to answer.

Are the problems experienced by Toyota unique, or could other manufacturers have similar design flaws that warrant possible recall?

Was Toyota reckless, negligent, or just slow in its response to protect its customers once the existence of problems were reported and later became clear?

Has the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration been sufficiently proactive in its regulatory oversight of Toyota and other carmakers?

Has Congress given the Department of Transportation sufficient resources to meet its regulatory responsibility, and if not, what more needs to be done to protect the American public?

Has the government been asleep at the switch when it comes to automobile safety, and if so, who is responsible?

The American people have grown increasingly anxious about their safety in light of the events that prompted today's hearing. It is our responsibility, Mr. Chairman, to conduct a thorough investigation of the facts, and if necessary, to craft legislative remedies that ensure the safety of everyone on our nation's roads and highways.

Within this committee's jurisdiction, we have no greater responsibility than to protect the American people, and we must not forget that today's hearing is a solemn occasion examining a failure that has resulted in dozens of deaths and injuries.

For many years, Toyota has been a leader in the automotive industry. As a Toyota owner, I would add that I believe the company's reputation for quality is well-earned. For the past decade, Toyota's market share has gradually risen, and consumer confidence has increased. As an innovator in fuel-efficient, affordable vehicles, Toyota has worked hard to build an impressive reputation and a strong company that provides Americans with quality products and thousands of jobs here in the United States.

In recent weeks, we have learned what both Toyota and government regulators at the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration have known since at least 2003. A problem in some vehicles has caused sudden unintended accelerations in a number of Toyota products. It took four years, however, before any real attempt at corrective action was taken. It wasn't until just a few weeks ago that a full recall was issued, and it is still unclear why some Toyota products are defective while others are not, and whether we've seen the end of the problem. Toyota customers deserve clear answers about what went wrong, what corrective action needs to take place, and what lessons Toyota and the Department of Transportation have learned.

Mr. Chairman, it's important that we keep in mind that every year over 40,000 Americans are killed in motor vehicle collisions. Often alcohol is a factor. We cannot reasonably expect that even the best designs and precautions can prevent all such deaths. Flaws in designs, though usually minor and not easily detected, accompany efforts by manufacturers to make advances in areas such as safety and fuel economy. These advances, however, consistently yield safer and more dependable vehicles than those coming out of assembly lines 10 years ago.

It would be wrong not to credit Toyota for years of engineering advances that overcame past problems and, ultimately, saved many lives. Nevertheless, customers and the American people expect that when reports of safety problems first surface, both manufacturers and government safety officials take them seriously and ensure that proper expertise and attention is applied to the examination of complaints or warnings. Customers also expect that when problems are identified, manufacturers and government officials will work quickly and cooperatively to provide timely and accurate information to those affected and provide a solution as expeditiously as possible. In the case of the Toyota recall, these expectations have clearly not been met.

Thank you, again, Mr. Chairman, for your commitment to a responsible, fact-based oversight effort. I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses and hope this hearing will give millions of Toyota owners clear answers and explanations about this situation.

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