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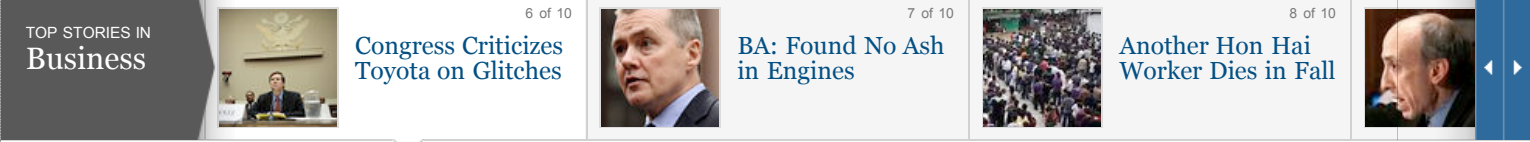
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# Congress Criticizes Toyota on Glitches

Article

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By MIKE RAMSEY And JOSH MITCHELL

WASHINGTON—**Toyota Motor Corp.** on Thursday came under heavy criticism from Congress about its efforts to find glitches that could cause its vehicles to accelerate suddenly, although it left Capitol Hill with the tacit support of U.S. safety regulators.

The head of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration told a House panel that the agency's tests support Toyota's own assertion that electronic throttle controls aren't causing unintended acceleration.

"We have found no evidence of additional causes of the defect, but that doesn't mean we've stopped looking," said David Strickland, director of the safety agency, at a House Energy and Commerce Committee hearing.

Sudden acceleration has been blamed for dozens of accidents, including some resulting in fatalities, forcing Toyota to recall about eight million vehicles globally. The Japanese auto maker has identified the cause of the problem as ill-fitting floor mats that can pin down the gas pedals in some of its vehicles, or a type of gas pedal that can get stuck.

Toyota issued separate recalls to fix those issues in affected vehicles, which include its popular Camry sedan and Corolla compact. Jim Lentz, president of Toyota's U.S. sales arm, told Congress that 3.5 million vehicles had been repaired so far, and the goal was to reach 100% of affected vehicles, whereas most recalls reach about 70%.

Contrary to speculation by some experts, the company contends the problem isn't caused by glitches in its electronics, such as those that send signals from the electronic gas pedal to the engine, or the computer that controls the engine.

Mr. Strickland's statement indicates NHTSA agrees with the car maker.



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Bloomberg News

On Thursday, however, the House committee continued to raise questions about whether Toyota had conducted an objective investigation into its electronics. In particular, the committee focused on whether the outside consulting firm Toyota used to review its electronics, **Exponent Inc.**, was simply producing the results the car maker desired.

The committee's chairman, Rep. Henry

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Jim Lentz, president of Toyota's U.S. sales arm, reiterated that the company is confident its electronics aren't behind unintended acceleration.

Waxman (D., Calif.), along with Rep. Bruce Braley (D., Iowa) and other members focused on a document that indicated Exponent had been dealing directly with

Toyota's legal team. Mr. Waxman said it suggested that Exponent's work appeared to be designed only to disprove lawsuits and not root out potential problems.

"Toyota has repeatedly told the public that it has conducted extensive testing of its vehicles for electronic defects. We can find no basis for these assertions," Mr. Waxman said.

Toyota's Mr. Lentz reiterated that the company is confident its electronics aren't behind unintended acceleration. Vehicles made by Toyota and its Lexus luxury brand "are inherently designed so that a real-world, uncommanded acceleration of the vehicle cannot occur," he said.

Still, Toyota is retrofitting three million vehicles with systems that give priority to the brake if both the brake and gas pedals are depressed. This "brake override" technology cuts the power to the engine and could halt an unintended-acceleration incident.

Mr. Lentz said it would be too difficult and time-consuming to add the system to all of its vehicles in customers' hands since "it takes an incredible amount of time and engineering resources."

He said Exponent in the past week now reports to Steve St. Angelo, the company's new quality chief.

NHTSA's Mr. Strickland told the committee that Toyota had become more responsive and had acted quickly to address to recent safety concerns with recalls.

But even with the agency's support, Toyota faces potentially costly and embarrassing lawsuits from families of people who were injured or killed in accidents linked to sudden acceleration. Still other Toyota owners have gone to court seeking compensation for the decline in the value of their Toyota vehicles because of the defects.

Mr. Strickland noted the Department of Justice had been asked to help the regulator look through volumes of Toyota documents related to what company executives knew about the problem and when they knew it.

Toyota recently paid a \$16.4 million fine to NHTSA in connection with its recalls.

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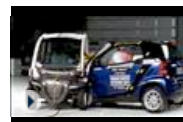
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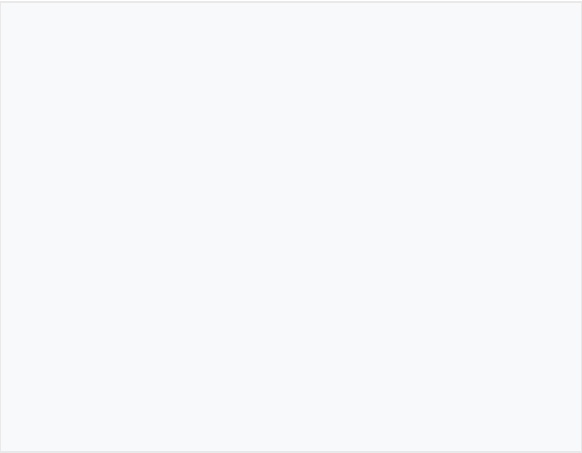
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