

WILL AKIO TOYODA TESTIFY ON BRAKES?

As you may know, there are a slew of hearings scheduled next week to try to understand the Toyota brake problems. The head of Toyota (and grandson of the company founder) caused a bit of a stir yesterday when he tried to correct the mistaken impression that he would testify personally.

Akio Toyoda told a press conference Wednesday morning that he would not travel from Tokyo to Washington, D.C., to answer questions from a Congressional panel on car safety. No, this is not as bad as when General Motors sicked detectives on Ralph Nader, but Toyota is getting there.

"I trust that our officials in the U.S. will amply answer the questions," Toyoda said.

Rather than have a guy bearing the company name testify, Toyota was sending Yoshimi Inaba, President of Toyota North America and—rather significantly—someone who was away from the company for two of the years in which Toyota was not responding to its own brake problems. In addition, Inaba's background with the company is also primarily in sales, not engineering. In other words, rather than have Toyoda testify, the company was sending a guy who, just six months after he assumed a position of authority, agreed to recall millions of cars.

At the same press conference yesterday, Toyoda said he might consider testifying personally if he was invited.

But after persistent questioning, Mr. Toyoda said he "would consider" appearing before Congress if he receives a formal invitation, which none of the committees have issued.

So, in an unsurprising move, the House Reform Committee has now done just that, invite Toyota to testify publicly.

Dear Mr. Toyota:

As you know, there is widespread public concern regarding reports of sudden unintended acceleration in Toyota motor vehicles. Toyota has recalled millions of its vehicles and even halted production. In addition, there are reports that this problem may have been the direct cause of serious injury and even death.

There appears to be growing public confusion regarding which vehicles may be affected and how people should respond. In short, the public is unsure as to what exactly the problem is, whether it is safe to drive their cars, or what they should do about it.

To help clarify this situation, I am inviting you to testify at a hearing of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform on Wednesday, February 24, 2010, at 10 a.m. in room 2154 Rayburn House Office Building.

[snip]

Sincerely,

Edolphus Towns

Chairman

It'll be hard for Toyota to decline this invitation and save face. So it'll be interesting to see how serious Toyota is about not testifying under oath to the US Congress.

Update: Toyota accepts.

We are pleased Mr. Toyota accepted the invitation to testify before the Committee. We believe his testimony will be helpful in understanding the

actions Toyota is taking to ensure the safety of American drivers.