

NATION/WORLD DIGEST

Toyota: Recalls Won't Totally Fix Problems

WASHINGTON (AP) — The president of Toyota's U.S. operations acknowledged to skeptical lawmakers on Tuesday that the company's recalls of millions of its cars may "not totally" solve the problem of sudden and dangerous acceleration.

"We are vigilant and we continue to look for potential causes," Toyota's James Lentz told a congressional panel. However, he repeated his company's position that unexpected acceleration in some of the company's most popular cars and trucks was caused by one of two problems — misplaced floor mats and sticking accelerator pedals.

He insisted electronic systems connected to the gas pedal and fuel line did not contribute to the problem, drawing sharp criticism from lawmakers who said such a possibility should be further explored — and from a tearful woman driver who could not stop her runaway Lexus.

"Shame on you, Toyota," Rhonda Smith, of Sevierville, Tenn., said at a congressional hearing. Then she added a second "shame on you" directed at federal highway safety regulators.

Cheney Feeling Better After Heart Attack

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former Vice President Dick Cheney sustained a "mild heart attack" but is feeling better and likely to leave the hospital within a day or two, an aide said Tuesday.

Cheney, 69, who has remained a forceful advocate for the former Bush administration and a leading Republican figure since leaving office last year, has a history of heart trouble. He was admitted to George Washington University Hospital in Washington on Monday after experiencing chest pains.

Lab tests revealed evidence of a mild heart attack, Cheney aide Peter Long said in a statement. Long reported that Cheney is "feeling good" after undergoing a stress test and a heart catheterization. The latter procedure examines blood flow to the heart and tests how well the heart is pumping.

A heart attack occurs when blood flow to the heart muscle is blocked. The statement from Cheney's office did not say whether he needed to have an angioplasty, a procedure to clear a blockage.

Full-Body Scanners Starting in Two Weeks

WASHINGTON (AP) — The first of 150 full-body scanners planned for U.S. airports will be installed in Boston next week, officials said Tuesday.

The plan is to install three machines at Logan International Airport, according to a homeland security official who spoke on condition of anonymity because the announcement has not yet been made. In the next two weeks, officials plan to install another machine at Chicago's O'Hare International.

The rest of the 150 machines that were purchased with \$25 million from President Barack Obama's 2009 stimulus plan are expected to be installed in airports by the end of June, another homeland security official, spokeswoman Amy Kudwa, said.

The use of the scanners in airports is key to the Obama administration's plans to improve airport security because of their ability to show objects hidden on the body. Body scanners have been available for years, but their deployment has been slowed by objections from privacy advocates.

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HEALTH CARE REFORM

Dems, GOP: Summit Won't Break Logjam

BY CHARLES BABINGTON
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Here's one point on which Democrats and Republicans agree on health care: President Barack Obama's much-touted televised summit has virtually no chance of breaking the political logjam.

That means Democrats will be forced to find a way to pass an overhaul on their own or face a huge political defeat.

Lawmakers from both parties suggested the Obama-hosted meeting Thursday will amount to little more than political theater. No cracks appeared in the GOP's overwhelming opposition to Democrats' efforts. And both parties saw the president's revised, far-reaching proposal, released Monday, as a call for Democrats to try to pass the legislation on their own under Senate rules that would bar Republican delaying tactics.

"We're happy to be there, but I'm not quite sure what the purpose is," Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said Tuesday of the daylong summit. "It seems to me the president's already made up his mind."

Underlining his points, McConnell invited some of Obama's sharpest critics, including the 2008 GOP presidential nominee, Sen. John McCain of Arizona, to join him. None of the GOP moderates who have raised the prospect of bipartisanship on health care, such as New Hampshire Sen. Judd Gregg or Maine Sen. Olympia Snowe, were included.

Democrats were equally dismissive of GOP demands that they start from scratch.

"This idea that we have to start with a blank sheet of paper is ridiculous," said Sen. Bob Casey, D-Pa.

That's not to say Thursday's six-hour meeting will play no role

in the long-running health care debate. As president, Obama is likely to dominate, but Republicans hope to use the session to criticize the Democratic plan's scope and cost, and to highlight their more modest alternatives.

Democrats are almost certain to portray the GOP alternatives as flimsy and unworkable. They hope the session will embolden rank-and-file Democratic lawmakers who face re-election this fall amid worries that public opposition to a full-scale overhaul of health care could doom them. Failing to pass a bill would be even worse, party leaders say.

Barring an unlikely bipartisan breakthrough, all but a handful of Democrats' votes will be needed to pass the legislation under Senate budget reconciliation rules, which

would disallow GOP filibusters. Democrats control 59 of the Senate's 100 seats. But they lost their ability to overcome Republican-led filibusters when GOP Sen. Scott Brown won a seat in Massachusetts last month.

The reconciliation strategy would require House Democrats to swallow several objections and approve a bill the Senate passed in December. Then Senate Democrats, under budget reconciliation rules, would have to make several changes demanded by the House and White House.

Sen. Joe Lieberman, a self-described "independent Democrat" from Connecticut, emerged from a Democratic strategy session Tuesday and said the health care legislation's prognosis is "unclear but clearly heading toward reconciliation."

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Joint Chiefs Warn Against Lifting Gay Ban Quickly

WASHINGTON (AP) — Top Army and Air Force officers said Tuesday they would be reluctant to overturn a 17-year policy that prohibits gays from serving openly in the military without more time to ascertain it won't hurt the services.

"I do have serious concerns about the impact of a repeal of the law on a force that is fully engaged in two wars and has been at war for eight and a half years," Army Chief of Staff Gen. George Casey told Congress. "We just don't know the impacts on readiness and military effectiveness."

As Casey cautioned the Senate Armed Services Committee against moving too fast to repeal the law, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Norton Schwartz made similar remarks before the House.

The carefully crafted comments indicate reluctance among the military's senior ranks to act anytime soon on President Barack Obama's plan to repeal the "don't ask, don't tell" policy.

Obama says the policy is wrongheaded and should change. Defense Secretary Robert Gates agrees but wants to move slowly, and has ordered a lengthy assessment on how to lift the ban without affecting troops and their families.

Officials expect the study to be complete by the end of the year, but that it could be several more years before the repeal is fully implemented.

In the meantime, congressional Democrats are debating how to advance the issue. Some party members are reluctant to repeal the 1993 law, while others want an immediate moratorium on dismissals.

The testimony by the service chiefs is considered crucial to the debate. As the top uniformed officials in each service, the chief is in charge of recruitment and preparing troops for deployments. If the policy on gays is overturned, they would have to decide how to implement the changes.

Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, already has said he thinks the law should be changed because it forces gay troops to compromise their integrity by lying about who they are.

On Wednesday, lawmakers will hear from Marine Corps Commandant Gen. James Conway, who is said to be an opponent of lifting the ban, and Adm. Gary Roughead, who is chief of naval operations.

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