



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on February 14, 2011

Transportation Secretary Advised Daughter: Buy Toyota

President Barack Obama was preaching economic patriotism when he addressed the U.S. Chamber of Commerce last week, urging the nation's business leaders to consider what they can do for their country, as well as for their balance sheets.

"Ask yourselves what you can do for America," the President declared. "Ask yourselves what you can do to hire American workers, to support the American economy and to invest in this nation." Later in the week, Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, less than two months after announcing the creation of his department's "Buy America" web site, told the world that he had advised his daughter to buy a car — a Japanese car.



"I told my daughter that she should buy the Toyota Sienna (photo, left), which she did," [LaHood said](#) in announcing the results of Department of Transportation study on the safety of Toyota models recalled last year due to a "sudden acceleration" problem. "So I think that illustrates that we feel that Toyota vehicles are safe to drive." A Fox News headline called the statement a "ridiculous gaffe."

LaHood may have been trying to undo the damage done to Toyota's stock a year ago when he advised people to stop driving any of the Toyota models involved in the company's recall of eight million vehicles. The "sudden acceleration" had caused the cars to increase speed on their own, even as drivers were trying to slow or stop, creating an obvious safety hazard. Testifying before the House Appropriations Committee on February 3, 2010, LaHood was asked what advice he would give to the owners of the Toyotas that were subject to the recall.

"My advice is, if anybody owns one of these vehicles, stop driving it, take it to the Toyota dealer because they believe they have the fix for it," Lahood answered. After the hearing he told reporters he didn't mean to say, "stop driving it." "What I said in there was obviously a misstatement," he said. "My advice is if you have one of these vehicles, if you are in doubt, take it to the dealership today."

"Toyota Motor Corp. shares sank rapidly," following Lahood's comment to the committee, [FoxNews.com](#) reported at the time, "though the decline eased somewhat after the secretary clarified his statement."

So LaHood was pleased last week to announce the results of a 10-month long Department of Transportation study to determine if the sudden acceleration was the result of the electronic systems in the vehicles. The study, which Lahood described as "one of the most exhaustive, thorough, and intensive research efforts ever taken," found the electronic systems were sound.

"The two mechanical safety defects identified by NHTSA (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration) more than a year ago — 'sticking' accelerator pedals and a design flaw that enabled accelerator pedals to become trapped by floor mats — remain the only known causes for these kinds of



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unsafe unintended acceleration incidents," the DOT announced in a press release. Apparently those problems have been resolved, since LaHood has determined the cars are safe enough for his daughter to drive.

Still, the makers General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler products may not be too thrilled at hearing the Secretary of Transportation announce he was recommending a Toyota purchase to a family member. Neither should the government LaHood works for, since the U.S. government is now a major shareholder of General Motors as a result of the 2009 bailout of the automotive giant. The Toyota Motor Corporation does employ workers, however, at five manufacturing plants in the United States: at Huntsville, Alabama; Georgetown, Kentucky; Princeton, Indiana; San Antonio, Texas; and Buffalo, West Virginia.

"Buy America provisions ensure that transportation infrastructure projects are built with American-made products. That means that Department of Transportation investments are able to support an entire supply chain of American companies and their employees," the DOT announced on the "[Buy America](#)" website that went up on December 11. The site informs the visitor that the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, better known as the economic stimulus plan, prohibits the use of recovery funds for a public construction, repair or maintenance project unless all of the iron, steel and manufactured goods used in the project are manufactured in the United States. Waivers may be granted if the American-made materials or products are not available in sufficient quantity or satisfactory quality or would increase the cost of the project by more than 25 percent.



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