



## Watered Down Vehicle Safety Bills Reflect Influence of Automakers

Written On June 8, 2010 By [Bob Kraft](#)

New auto safety bills have been introduced in the House and Senate. These bills are basically good for consumers, but they are considerably weaker than previous versions. This is due to negotiations with the auto manufacturers. The story is reported in the [Washington Post](#), and here are excerpts:

Automakers have reached a series of compromises with lawmakers over both the House and Senate versions of auto safety legislation aimed at forcing the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to set and enforce stricter standards, according to records and interviews.

The bills were drafted after congressional hearings in February that pointed to agency weaknesses in handling probes of runaway acceleration problems in Toyota vehicles that led to dozens of deaths and hundreds of serious injuries.

The proposed legislation, known as the Motor Safety Vehicle Act of 2010, would require the agency to set standards for the first time on electronic components in vehicles, increase penalties for automakers who lie or mislead the agency about safety defects

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and bar agency officials hired by automakers from working with the agency for three years.

Since the bills were introduced, lawmakers have made changes that eliminate or extend deadlines for setting some of the new safety standards; give the transportation secretary the discretion to set rules that had been mandated in earlier versions; and require safety standards to “mitigate” runaway acceleration rather than “prevent” the problem, records show.

Clarence Ditlow, executive director of the Center for Auto Safety, said that the compromises have weakened oversight on some of the same problems Toyota and government officials pointed to as contributing to runaway acceleration. For example, in earlier versions of the bill, the agency would have been required to set uniform standards for pedal construction and placement in two years and automakers would have been required to incorporate those standards in vehicles by 2014. The current versions of the legislation do not spell out those deadlines, and the standards would be set only if the transportation secretary deems it “necessary.”