

Trucking issue

by The San Diego Union-Tribune

U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary Peters is finally joining the discussion over whether to let Mexican trucks onto U.S. roads.

The debate over Mexican trucks has raged since the North American Free Trade Agreement was enacted in 1994. The treaty requires Mexico, Canada and the United States to open their highways to trucks from the other two countries. Canada was given access to U.S. roadways, but Mexico wasn't. The reason: The powerful Teamsters Union, which shamefully resorted to distortion and demagoguery in order to convince Democrats in Congress and President Clinton to violate the NAFTA provision.

The argument reignited last fall when the Bush administration launched a pilot program that allows Mexican trucks to haul cargo into the United States in line with our obligations under NAFTA. Democrats in Congress tried to kill the program by cutting off funding. The administration resisted and continued the program, which is to expire in September.

Last week during a House subcommittee hearing, Peters was scolded by Rep. Marcy Kaptur, D-Ohio, for continuing the program in defiance of Congress.

That's rich. In trying to keep out the Mexican trucks, it is Congress that is defying NAFTA.

Peters could have said that. She had the ammunition and she could have fired away at critics and their hypocrisy. Instead, she meekly defended the pilot program and offered assurances that Mexican trucks are meeting safety requirements, an often-cited concern of opponents. She also reiterated the administration's claim that the law passed by Congress was too narrowly written to end the program.

That's not good enough. If the Bush administration believes in NAFTA, and thinks the United States must live up to it, then it has to be willing to fight that battle. Make no mistake, it has a real fight on its hands.

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