

Oberstar, DeFazio cosponsor bill to restrict cross-border truck program

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

WASHINGTON, DC — A bill to place restrictions on the Department of Transportation's proposed pilot program for Mexico-domiciled trucks has won the support of the two key leaders of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. Committee Chairman James L. Oberstar (Minn.), and Highways and Transit Subcommittee Chairman Peter A. DeFazio (Ore.), have signed on to cosponsor the Safe American Roads Act of 2007. The bill is sponsored by Rep. Nancy Boyda of Kansas.

Highways and Transit Subcommittee Chairman Peter A. DeFazio (Ore.)

Oberstar said his support stems from concerns that the Mexican trucking industry, and that country's regulatory regime for motor carriers, still has not reached the point at which we can be assured that trucks crossing the international border can operate safely in this country.

"The Safe American Roads Act of 2007 will restore accountability and fairness to the process of opening the border, and ensure that the U.S. proceeds with caution while outstanding safety issues are verified," Oberstar said. "Several unanswered questions remain about whether the necessary systems are in place today to hold Mexico-domiciled motor carriers to the same strict federal standards that govern U.S. commercial truck operations, including hours of service, drug testing, and criminal background checks for drivers hauling hazardous materials."

"I have serious concerns about the Department of Transportation's proposed pilot program and its potential to compromise safety on U.S. highways," DeFazio said. "That's why I'm cosponsoring legislation that will require additional safety measures and require public notification and comment in developing the details of the program prior to any opening of our border. In addition, the legislation will prevent Mexico-domiciled motor carriers from accessing U.S. highways until U.S. based trucking companies are given comparable access in Mexico. We must ensure that the DOT does not rush to open the border without proper protections in place. The safety of the American public is at stake."

“Today, trucks registered in Mexico can drive only inside narrow border zones in the United States before their cargoes are transferred to an American vehicle. That’s a good system; it’s working. It keeps America’s highways safe from poorly regulated Mexican traffic, prevents drug smuggling and illegal immigration, and protects American transportation jobs,” said Boyda. “But now the Department of Transportation is proposing a pilot program to allow Mexican trucks to drive far, far into the heartland of America. Today I introduced legislation to ensure that the DOT fully respects America’s laws and our safety. This administration’s mad rush toward unrestricted trade should never endanger America’s citizens or their jobs. It just shouldn’t.”

Specifically, the bill:

Prohibits DOT from granting authority to Mexico-domiciled motor carriers to operate beyond the commercial zones on the U.S.-Mexico border, except under a pilot program that meets the requirements set out in the bill;

Requires the DOT cross-border pilot program to comply with all 22 requirements of the FY 2002 Department of Transportation Appropriations Act and all requirements set forth under TEA 21 relating to pilot programs;

Prohibits the Secretary from initiating a pilot program until U.S. motor carrier companies are allowed to begin comparable operations in Mexico;

Requires DOT, prior to initiation of the pilot program, to provide notice and opportunity for public comment on the details of the program, including the measures in place to protect the health and safety of the public, enforcement measures, penalties for non-compliance, and safety metrics used to evaluate the program;

Restricts the timeframe for a pilot program and requires termination no later than one year after enactment of the bill;

Requires an Inspector General review of the pilot program to determine whether Mexico-domiciled motor carriers participating in the pilot program are in full compliance with U.S. motor carrier safety laws, including the provisions detailed in Section 350, and a report to Congress within 90 days of completion of the pilot program; and

Requires DOT to submit a report to Congress on the results of the pilot program within 60 days of completion of the pilot program.

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