

It also was 30 years ago that Rankin was introduced to ASFSA and the concept that school foodservice could be a professional pursuit. "MSFSA's conference were small," she recalls, "So I went to my first state meeting in Connecticut. That got me fired up and, along with some other foodservice directors from Maine, we decided to start building up our own state association and making it more active."

Professional involvements "are hard work" Rankin admits. And many times her volunteer commitments require extra hours at work because, lacking funds to hire a full central office staff, Rankin first must handle all the business affairs of the district office. "Yet you learn so much by going to meetings and participating in your profession," she remarks. "Every time I go to a conference or event, I find out what's going on in the industry and the profession. Best of all is the exchange of ideas you get, because you can talk with other professionals one-on-one."

PRESERVATION AND PROGRESS

And while Rankin is a firm believer in the need for school foodservice professionals to meet with and learn from one another, she also emphasizes the need for the profession to build relationships with government, industry—and the public.

That realization came to Rankin—and many other school foodservice operators—in a big way, five years ago, when a push was made in Congress to eliminate the National School Lunch Program. As a result, child nutrition advocates from both large urban districts and small rural schools joined with politicians, industry partners and others to make their case for the need for school nutrition programs to remain a federal program.

Today, ending the National School Lunch Program is no longer an issue. The visibility and respect that the school food-service profession earned on Capitol Hill during the debate remains in force.

To preserve these gains and secure more victories, Rankin reports that the goal of the ASFSA PAC is to "ensure that supporters of child nutrition are re-elected to public office."

Like school foodservice directors across the country, Rankin also has focused attention on building bridges at the state level. Back home in Maine, she has helped the profession establish a presence in the state legislature, governor's mansion and in city and county councils statewide. Currently, school food-service directors in Maine are pressing for increased support of nutrition education programs.

In a career that already has spanned 40 years, Rankin has set a personal goal she hopes to achieve before retirement. "School foodservice should be respected enough to be recognized as an integral part of the education process, and therefore included in school planning," she asserts. "For example, determining how much time is allotted for lunch should have the same weight as planning for class periods, rather than just giving lunch whatever time is left over."

Because Rankin is employed in a small district, she enjoys—in a way not available to directors in many large districts—personal and daily contact with school officials. Therefore, she's enthused about the prospects of realizing her goals and seeing her district become a national model for integrating nutrition and education planning.

"Whether your district is large or small, the basic challenges are the same," Rankin concludes. "For example, I may not have the same computer system that a large district

has. But that's okay, because the real issue is that, with kids, you always need the human touch. Whatever your district's size, whether it's large or small, city or country, the most important thing we serve our students is a smile."

NATIONAL AMUSEMENT PARK RIDE SAFETY ACT OF 1999

HON. EDWARD J. MARKEY

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, October 6, 1999

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. Speaker, today I am joined by ten of my colleagues in introducing "The National Amusement Park Ride Safety Act of 1999." They include Representatives MILLER (CA), HOFFEL (PA), WEXLER (FL), KUCINICH (OH), LIPINSKI (IL), MALONEY (NY), WEINER (NY), DELAURO (NY), NEAL (MA) and WAXMAN (CA). This bill will restore the ability of the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) to investigate serious accidents in amusement parks that offer rides, such as roller coasters, which are permanently fixed to the site. While the CPSC has the authority to investigate accidents that occur on rides that move from site to site, rides that are permanently fixed in theme parks are off limits. This bill would correct this anomaly by closing the "roller coaster loophole."

Roller coasters are, in general, quite safe. But in the course of just 6 days at the end of August, an unusual number of tragedies on amusement park rides highlighted the fact that when something goes wrong on these rides, the consequences can be catastrophic. Today's rides are huge metal machines capable of hurling the human body through space at forces that exceed the Space Shuttle and at speeds that exceed 100 miles per hour. They are complex industrial-size mechanisms whose design, maintenance and operation can push the limits of physical tolerance even for patrons in peak condition, let alone members of the broad spectrum of the public who are invited to ride each day.

The fatalities at the end of August, which U.S. News & World Report termed "one of the most calamitous weeks in the history of America's amusement parks," included:

August 22—a 12-year-old boy fell to his death after slipping through a harness on the Drop Zone ride at Paramount's Great America Theme Park in Santa Clara, California;

August 23—a 20-year-old man died on the Shockwave roller coaster at Paramout King's Dominion theme park near Richmond, Virginia;

August 28—a 39-year-old woman and her 8-year-old daughter were killed when their car slid backward down a 30-foot ascent and crashed into another car, injuring two others on the Wild Wonder roller coaster at Gillian's Wonderland Pier in Ocean City, New Jersey.

The Consumer Product Safety Act charges the CPSC with the responsibility to protect the public against unreasonable risks of injuries and deaths associated with consumer products. However, rides in "fixed locations" such as theme parks are currently entirely exempt from safety regulation by the CPSC. State oversight is good in some places, bad in others, and in some states, the state has also ex-

empted "fixed locations" so that there is no federal or state regulatory body overseeing ride safety. The number of serious injuries on "fixed location" rides has risen dramatically from 1994 through 1998.

Why do we bar the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) from investigating accidents on roller coasters and from sharing that information with the rest of the country?

It makes no sense.

When a child is killed or injured on an amusement park ride, should the decision to investigate depend on whether the amusement park ride is "fixed" versus "mobile"?

Emergency-room injuries more than doubled in the last five years, yet the CPSC is prohibited from investigating any—not one—of those accidents, even when it involves a ride that may be in heavy use by mobile carnivals or fairs.

According to the CPSC Chair, Ann Brown, "The current regulatory structure as it applies to fixed-site amusement park rides is not sufficient to protect against unreasonable risks of injuries or deaths caused by these rides."

She is right.

The accident statistics highlight the folly of granting an exemption from federal safety regulation to amusement park rides. Injuries are rising rapidly on the one category of amusement park rides that the CPSC is barred from overseeing. The manufacturer or owner of every other consumer product in America is required by law to inform the CPSC whenever it becomes aware that the product may pose a substantial risk of harm—but not the owners or operators of "fixed-site" rides in amusement parks.

Some in the industry argue that this legislation is unnecessary because the states or the industry itself can provide sufficient protection. This argument fails on two counts.

First, many states have simply failed to step in where the federal safety agency has been excluded. The CPSC reports that there is still no state-level inspection program in Alabama, Arizona, Kansas, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Texas, Utah and Vermont. In addition, Florida exempts the big theme parks from state inspection, Virginia relies on private inspections, and New York exempts New York City (which includes Coney Island.) California had no state program until last month.

Second, states are not equipped and not inclined to act as a national clearinghouse of safety problems associated with particular rides or with operator or patron errors. That is a federal function. Yet the federal agency charged with the protection of the public against unreasonable risk of injury or death is currently, by law, forbidden from carrying out this important task.

I urge my colleagues to support this measured effort to close the loopholes and to ensure patrons of amusement parks that the level of protection afforded by law will no longer hinge on the question of whether the ride itself is "mobile" or "fixed."