

enactment of H.R. 2084, the Department of Transportation Appropriations Act.

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Mr. Speaker, I submit the copy of his full letter for the RECORD. This is in response to a clear need outlined by the Secretary of Transportation. I urge speedy passage of this legislation.

THE SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION,
Washington, DC, October 12, 1999.

Hon. BUD SHUSTER,
Chairman, Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure, U.S. House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: I am writing to urge Congress to act quickly on legislation to restore enforcement authorities underlying our motor carrier safety programs that were suspended October 9th as a result of enactment of H.R. 2084, the Department of Transportation and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2000.

The need to act is clear. We currently have 922 cases pending, involving a total of \$5,985,000 in outstanding civil penalty claims. Our work with the Department's Inspector General and the U.S. Attorney's office is in abeyance, and the exercise of some other authorities is now subject to question.

The need to act expeditiously on permanent legislation that increases the resources and regulatory and enforcement tools of the motor carrier office is also clear. Congress and the Administration, through the work of the Department's Inspector General, Mr. Norman Y. Mineta, and committee hearings and our own analysis, have identified the need to increase the effectiveness of motor carrier programs.

Both your Committee and the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation have reported or will shortly report legislation to address the breadth of motor carrier safety issues. In July, the Administration submitted comprehensive legislation as well. Many provisions in the three bills can be combined now to give us truly effective motor carrier legislation. The safety gains in these proposals should be paramount, as reflected in the principle of H.R. 2679 that safety be the foremost consideration of the motor carrier group, and organizational considerations should not supplant progress on the safety front. Therefore, I will work with Congress to resolve these organizational issues—in a way that ensures successful implementation of our mutual safety goals.

In May, I announced a comprehensive program to address motor carrier safety, setting a goal of a 50 percent reduction in fatalities from motor carrier-related crashes over the next ten years. The Department has redoubled its efforts over the past year, implementing a series of actions to strengthen our program. We developed a draft Safety Action Plan with approximately 65 specific safety initiatives to be completed in the next three years.

To date, we have doubled the number of compliance reviews accomplished by safety investigators each month. Comparing the periods January to April 1999 and May to August 1999, total compliance reviews increased

59 percent. Financial penalties have increased from an average of \$1,600 to \$3,200 per enforcement case. The backlog of enforcement cases has been reduced by two-thirds, from 1,174 to 363. The number of Federal investigators at the U.S. Mexico border has increased from 13 to 40—a 200-percent increase.

I urge action by Congress as rapidly as possible on the two bills, both of which are essential to strengthening our motor carrier safety programs.

Sincerely,

RODNEY E. SLATER.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise in to address H.R. 3036 and truck safety. This bill suspends language in the Transportation Appropriations bill and restores responsibility for all truck safety activities to the Secretary of Transportation. This action comes due to nearly 5,000 people being killed in truck related accidents in each of the past three years on our nation's highways. There are many agencies within our government that have a shared responsibility for safety on our nation's highways, including the Transportation Department, the NTSB and the Federal Highway Administration. But despite much talk and discussion, several hearings, and meetings over improving trucking safety we have had little action aimed at improving safety.

What we do have is accident after accident involving truck drivers who are too tired and even drunk. A total of 5,374 people died in accidents involving large trucks which represents 13 percent of all the traffic fatalities in 1998 and in addition 127,000 were injured in those crashes.

In Houston, Texas, a man (Kurt Groten) 38 years old and his three children David, 5, Madeline, 3, and Adam, 1, were killed in a horrific accident when a 18-wheel truck crashed into their vehicle. His wife, the only survivor of the crash, testified in criminal proceedings against the driver last week stating "I saw that there was a whole 18-wheeler on top of our car. * * * I remember standing there and screaming, 'My life is over! All of my children are dead!'"

Martinez was convicted on last Friday and the jury now must decide if he gets probation or up to 20 years in prison for each of the four counts of intoxication manslaughter.

This is but one example of the thousands of terrible and fatal trucking accidents that are caused every year on our nation's roads and highways.

We need an agency within the government to ensure that the rules are adhered to and those safety technologies like recording devices are implemented into the system. I want to ensure, like many Members, that there are no more Mrs. Groten's in America.

Truckers are required to maintain logbooks for their hours of service. But truckers have routinely falsified records, and many industry observers say, to the point that they are often referred to as "comic books." In their 1995 findings the National Transportation Safety Board found driver fatigue and lack of sleep were factors in up to 30 percent of truck crashes that resulted in fatalities. In 1992 report the NTSB reported that an astonishing 19 percent of truck drivers surveyed said they had fallen asleep at the wheel while driving. Recorders on trucks can provide a tamperproof mechanism that can be used for

accident investigation and to enforce the hours-of-service regulations, rather than relying on the driver's handwritten logs.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the trucking industry is concerned by the added cost of the recorders. I also appreciate the fact that close to eighty percent of this country's goods move by truck and that the industry has a major impact on our economy. But can we afford to put our wallets before safety? Ask yourselves where we would be without recorders in commercial aviation, rail, or the marine industry? I think that I have good idea what the answer is, we would not know what caused that accident nor would we be able to learn from our mistakes.

Mr. Speaker, let us vote today to put action behind our discussion and ensure that safety comes first.

Mr. RAHALL. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. PETRI. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SHIMKUS). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. PETRI) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3036, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

The title of the bill was amended so as to read: "A bill to restore motor carrier safety enforcement authority to the Department of Transportation."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. PETRI. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 3036, the bill just passed.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Wisconsin?

There was no objection.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair will now put the question on each motion to suspend the rules on which further proceedings were postponed earlier today in the order in which that motion was entertained.

Votes will be taken in the following order:

House Resolution 303, by the yeas and nays;

S. 800, by the yeas and nays; and
H.R. 2130, de novo.

The Chair will reduce to 5 minutes the time for any electronic vote after the first such vote in this series.