TRANSPORTATION APPROPRIATIONS AND LONG-HAUL TRUCKERS

Mr. WELLSTONE. Madam President, just in the time we have remaining, I really would like for us to move forward on this legislation and, indeed, on other legislation that is important to people’s lives.

I want to speak to three different questions.

First of all, on the Murray amendment—and presumably we will have more time for debate; I do not know whether or not we have a filibuster that is going to be sustained or whether or not there is going to be some agreement, but I want to thank Senator MURRAY for her good work.

I tell you, people in Minnesota, as we look at I-35 coming from the south, are interested in safe drivers and safe trucking and safe highways. They are interested in their own safety. Frankly, I think it is terribly important that all of us support Senator MURRAY’s amendment.

For my own part, I also want to give a lot of credit to what Congressman Sabo from our State of Minnesota has done on the House side. He basically has said, we are not going to have the funding to grant the permits because there is just simply no way that right now we are going to be able to have any assurance that the safety standards are going to be there.

I want to make one point that perhaps was brought up yesterday in the debate but which I think is really important as well. As a Senator, I do not really make any apology for also being interested in their own safety. Frankly, I think it is terribly important that all of us support Senator MURRAY’s amendment.

In particular, I think the very powerful implications of all this are as we see more and more subcontractors crossing the border at maquilas, it is far better, from the point of view of people in Minnesota, that the subcontractors to our auto plants or to other parts of our economy are located in the United States. With a lot of the transportation being done by American trucks, that is what happens.

The Bush administration is pushing this full force, and they are not even interested in respect for the safety standards.

The other thing that is going to happen is, you are going to have more and more subcontractors basically located in Mexico because Mexican trucks take whatever is produced there right to wherever it needs to go in the United States, thus eliminating a lot of other jobs.

So I think this is not just about truck drivers, not just about Teamsters, not just about safety—all of which I think is very important—I think it is also about living-wage jobs in our own country. It is also about our economy. Frankly, in some ways, though I support the Murray amendment, I really see Mr. Sabo’s effort. And we will see what happens on the floor of the Senate, whether or not we will have an amendment similar to Mr. Sabo’s amendment in this Chamber.

But I think, at the very minimum, we have to insist on the safety standards, and, at a maximum, eventually we are also going to have to have yet more honest discussion about this new global economy and where people fit into it. All that happened in Italy and all that happened in Seattle I would not defend—not all of it, by any means, but what I will tell you is that there are an awful lot of people in our country and throughout the world who are losing very important justice questions. They are not arguing that we are in a national economy alone. They are not arguing that we ought to put up walls on the borders. But they are arguing, if we are going to have a new global economy and we are in an international time, then above and beyond it working for large financial institutions and multinational corporations; it ought to work for working people; it ought to work for human rights; it ought to work for small producers; and it ought to work for the environment.

Frankly, I think that is part of what is being debated in this Chamber. We have a very, what I would call incremental, pragmatic amendment, which Senator Murray has done an admirable job of defending. I am amazed other Senators believe this goes too far by way of assuring basic safety on our highways, I think we need to defend Senator Murray’s effort.

Above and beyond that, I have some real questions about whether or not all of this will be enforced and then properly certified. Then above and beyond that, I have some real questions about these trade agreements and the impact they have on whether or not we will have living-wage jobs for the people in our country to enable people to earn a decent standard of living so they can support their families.

And above and beyond all that, eventually, I am telling you—it may not be this year; it may be 5 years from now; it may be 10 years from now—we are going to design some new rules for this international economy, so that rather than driving environmental standards down, or wages down, with a complete lack of respect for human rights, we can have the kind of standards that lift up people’s lives.

A PRESCRIPTION DRUG BENEFIT

Mr. WELLSTONE. Madam President, since we are, for the moment, stalemated here, I rise to express my strong commitment to our moving forward on a prescription drug benefit. Obviously, we will not be able to do it now, but we do believe that prescription drug benefits within the VA. I asked him several times whether or not he felt that their global budget and the discount they insist on has enabled them...