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House of Representatives

The House met at 9 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mrs. WILSON).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
July 20, 1999.

I hereby appoint the Honorable HEATHER WILSON to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

J. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 19, 1999, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 25 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to 5 minutes, but in no event shall debate extend beyond 9:50 a.m.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for 5 minutes.

NAFTA/BORDER CROSSING

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Madam Speaker, part of the challenge of a livable community is to help people compete in and adjust to the new global economy. Trade in North America is an important part of that challenge. Since the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement, the commerce between Mexico and the United States has grown from \$80 billion to about \$200 billion and is steadily rising. In part, it could be said to be working.

But there are some points of serious challenge that are hidden in the statistics about commerce. I am particularly concerned about lax cross-border crossing controls that put the driving public at risk and put United States trucking and passenger transport at a competitive disadvantage.

There are some very serious problems, the most significant of which is that Mexican enforcement programs are still virtually nonexistent 5 years after the enactment of NAFTA. And according to the Inspector General, our own United States Department of Transportation does not, and I quote, "... have a consistent enforcement program that provides reasonable assurance of the safety of Mexican trucks entering the United States."

Furthermore, should the moratorium on cross-border trucking be lifted in the near term, our Department of Transportation is not ready to reasonably enforce the United States' safety regulation on Mexican carriers. Few of the 11,000 trucks now crossing daily into the United States are inspected, and almost one-half of those which are inspected have problems so serious they must be immediately ordered off the road. Yet, it is not clear even those ordered off the road comply.

Also, the Department of Transportation and State inspectors do not routinely provide inspection coverage on evenings or weekends, thereby allowing thousands of trucks to enter the United States without even the threat of possible inspection.

It is not just a problem dealing with trucking. Mexican buses and passenger vans pose a serious threat to highway safety, with low inspection rates and an out-of-service rate twice as high as United States buses.

Under recently enacted TEA 21, \$124 million of infrastructure was allocated for border and trade corridor investment. There is certainly the need and there are resources available. The DOT

should use the \$10 million per year in TEA 21 for national priority and border safety enforcement activities to station staff at the border and to assist State border oversight efforts.

Moreover, Texas and Arizona border inspection facilities and staffing are woefully inadequate. Neither State has permanent truck inspection facilities at the border, even though 76 percent of cross-border truck traffic entering the United States comes through those two States.

The issue goes beyond just simply what happens at those borders. There are 24 other non-border States that the Inspector General found where over 600 inspection records suggest that 68 motor carriers domiciled in Mexico operated illegally outside the permitted United States commercial zones.

I feel very strongly, as a person who supports free trade, and I would have voted for NAFTA had I been in Congress at that time, because my area and increasingly the United States economy is contingent upon free and open trade activity, but there is no excuse for us to have at risk our environmental and safety laws.

This week over 30 of my colleagues are calling upon the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure chairman, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. SHUSTER), and the ranking member, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR), to consider convening hearings on these serious cross-border problems associated with commercial vehicles and NAFTA. Being able to focus on the problem, and more important, to be able to bring the United States' action to bear, both on the Federal level and the State level, is critical if we are going to fully realize the promise of free trade without putting our Nation's citizens and our environmental laws at risk.

This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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