Republicans Are Getting Caught In A Traffic Jam

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Those who have unkindly called the Republican Party the Stupid Party have new evidence for their opinion. President Bush and 30 Republican Senators are trying to crowd our highways with Mexican trucks that are not required to meet the same safety, weight, licensing and insurance standards required of American trucks.
Do you think we need more 18-wheelers on our nation's highways? Do you think our highways are in such good repair that we can accommodate 14,000 additional trucks every month?

When the next big truck is tailgating you on the highway, do you care whether the truck has insurance to pay for any possible accident? whether the driver and truck are licensed, or using forged documents? whether the truck has any brakes? President Bush and 30 Republican Senators made it clear on July 26 and 27 in two votes and a veto threat that they are willing to sacrifice your safety on the altar of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement).

U.S. and Canadian trucks can't drive on our highways without adequate insurance from a company licensed to operate within the United States. It's unacceptable to allow Mexican trucks on our highways that do not meet this essential requirement.

During the Clinton Administration, Mexican trucks were restricted to a commercial zone in four states. They carry only Mexican insurance policies that are good for only one day and are granted without regard to the condition of the truck.

But President Bush, in his new coziness with Mexican President Vicente Fox, wants to let them drive freely anywhere in the United States starting January 1. And he wants to forgo inspections for 18 months!

Mexican trucks pose a real danger to the safety of Americans because they are so far below the standards we require for U.S. and Canadian trucks. Mexican trucks are 50 percent more likely to be ordered off the road for severe safety deficiencies than U.S. trucks.

Mexican trucks have been crossing our border grossly over weight, without registration or U.S. insurance, with unlicensed drivers driving far longer hours than U.S. truckers are permitted to drive.

The four-state limit has been routinely violated. Mexican trucks have been discovered in 26 states, as far away as New York, Washington State and Florida.

Senators Patty Murray (D-OR) and Richard Shelby (R-AL) sponsored a safety amendment, unanimously approved by both the Senate Appropriations Committee and its Transportation Subcommittee, to the $60 billion Transportation bill. Their amendment was approved by the Senate 70-30, with all Democrats and 16 Republicans voting for safety and 30 Republicans voting for Mexican trucks.

The Murray-Shelby amendment was promptly accused of being anti- NAFTA and even anti-Mexican, both of which are false. When the NAFTA panel ruled that the United States must admit Mexican trucks, it also ruled that "U.S. authorities are responsible for the safe operation of trucks within U.S. territory."

The United States has a uniform commercial drivers license system so that drivers whose licenses are revoked can't simply go to another state and get a new license. Mexico has no such system; Mexico has

hardly any computerized data on who gets a drivers license and no system for accurately monitoring the safety record of drivers.

The claim that the Senate bill "discriminates" against Mexican trucks is false. There is no reason why Mexican drivers and trucks shouldn't be subject to the same requirements as U.S. drivers and trucks.

Current U.S. law requires U.S. and Canadian trucks to be inspected at the trucking firm's facility where the record books, log-books, wage and hour records, etc., can be reviewed. There is no reason why Mexican trucks should not be subject to the same procedure.

The Senate bill requires Mexican trucks to cross the border only at points where inspectors are actually on duty. The bill closes the current loophole through which unsafe Mexican trucks cross the border at places and times where it is known that no safety inspector is on duty.

Border crossings must be equipped with weigh stations. There are no weigh stations in Mexico and Mexican trucks operate at weights far in excess of weights that U.S. trucks are permitted to carry.

Today, when a U.S. state trooper comes across a highway accident or flags down a vehicle, within minutes he is able to communicate with a database that gives him full information about who owns the license and whether the truck or driver has a prior record of accidents. That will be impossible if you are hit by a Mexican truck because Mexico doesn't even have a functioning database of trucks and truck drivers, much less one that is accurate and accessible to U.S. law enforcement officers.