

**Senator Barbara Boxer**  
**Opening Statement**  
**Commerce Committee Hearing**  
**on NAFTA Truck Safety**  
**July 18, 2001**

Good morning. Mr. Chairman, I appreciate you holding a hearing on this important topic today.

This is a key issue for the state of California. My state has about 23 percent of all of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) truck traffic. If our nation's highways are completely open to these trucks, I am concerned that there will be many unsafe trucks driving on our highways and roads.

In 1999, there were 4.5 million commercial motor vehicles crossing at the border. It is estimated that most of these crossings were made by 80,000 trucks.

The opening of the borders is expected to increase the number of NAFTA trucks. Currently, the Department of Transportation has 190 applications from companies wanting full access. Unless safety standards are improved and enforced, the result will be that Californians—whether driving to work or to their children's soccer game—will be sharing the road with drivers who are sleep deprived and whose trucks are not safe.

There are several issues that I hope will be addressed today.

First, I am concerned about the safety standards of NAFTA drivers. If we compare U.S. standards to those in Mexico, we can see that Mexican workers are not protected. For example, U.S. drivers can drive up to ten hours consecutively and work up to 15 consecutive hours, with a mandatory eight hours of rest. Overall, U.S. truck drivers cannot drive more than 70 hours during each eight day period. Mexican drivers do not have such protections. They are forced into working long hours—and tired drivers are not safe on our highways.

For the protection of all drivers on the highways, U.S. drivers have random drug tests, medical condition disqualifications, and must be 21 to receive a commercial drivers' license. This is not true for cross-border truck drivers.

Second, I am concerned about the condition of the trucks. Cross-border trucks are not required to have as comprehensive standards as U.S. trucks in areas such as anti-lock brakes,

**-more-**

underride guards, night visibility, and front brakes.

Cross-border trucks have a higher weight limit of 135,000 pounds versus 80,000 in the U.S. Trucks that weigh more than the limit will cause highways and roads to deteriorate more quickly. Also, heavier trucks result in accidents because they cannot brake as quickly. For example, a 100,000 pound truck travels 25 percent further after the driver steps on the brakes than will an 80,000 pound truck.

Third, I am concerned about lax standards in hazardous materials. If there is an accident and certain chemicals are not labeled, this can be a life-threatening situation for police and firefighters who arrive at the scene of the accident.

Fourth, I am concerned about enforcement. Currently, one percent of all trucks crossing the border are inspected. The Inspector General has stated that more inspectors—at least 139—are crucial as a deterrent to unsafe trucks.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to discussing these issues with the witnesses, and I thank you again for holding this hearing.

###