

STATEMENT for Senator Cleland  
Cross Border Trucking and bus Operations  
July 18, 2001

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate your holding this hearing today so that this Committee can help contribute to the safety of the American highway traveling public.

While I have no doubt that the Department of Transportation (DOT) means it when it states that safety is its highest priority, I am troubled by the fact that the border is understaffed and stretched too thin to inspect adequately all trucks crossing into the United States. One way to deal with this problem is to increase staff at the border, which I support. The Administration has recommended an additional \$88.2 million in additional funding in fiscal year 2002, and the Senate Appropriations Committee has provided \$103 million in additional funding for cross-border truck safety.

The findings by the DOT Inspector General that the border crossings which are fully staffed twenty four hours a day have fewer trucks placed out of service and that those crossing areas without full staff experience greatly increased out of service rates indicate to me that unsafe trucks are getting into the country. These trucks know where to cross the border and at what times. They know how to beat the current system. Additional staff is one part of helping with this problem.

Last year would have been the first opportunity for Mexican trucks to travel freely throughout the United States if the NAFTA provisions would have been implemented. Seven years after passage of NAFTA we should not be seeing the excessive noncompliance rates and troublesome safety records if Mexican carriers are serious about traveling in the U.S. Given the fact that the post-NAFTA world has seen a large movement of the manufacturing industry to Mexico, this trend is likely to be replicated with the trucking industry. The U.S. should anticipate more truck traffic from Mexican domiciled trucks looking to deliver goods throughout the U.S. and on in to Canada. If it has taken seven years to make the modest improvements seen today, I do not want to tell the citizens of Georgia and the U.S. that in another couple of years we will see much safer Mexican trucks on our roads, but in the meantime, we will allow these questionable trucks to drive on our roads. My constituents insist that Congress must ensure the safety of these trucks traveling our roads now!

Additionally, whenever a large truck is involved in an accident, it is bound to be serious. In Georgia, I am very aware of the traffic problems we have under the current conditions, and the logjam that is created anytime a motor carrier is involved in an accident on I-285 or elsewhere around the city of Atlanta. This condition would be exacerbated if trucks that have not passed U.S. safety inspections are allowed to travel on our highways, and I can see this pattern being repeated throughout the country. For this reason, I support the language Chairman Murray and Senator Shelby are seeking to include in the FY2002 DOT Appropriations bill requiring vigorous safety inspections of Mexican domiciled trucks by properly trained inspections officials and subsequent inspections by the DOT Inspector General to ensure compliance.

I do not believe this action is discriminatory against the Mexican trucking industry. To say that it is to

doubt the integrity of the research of the Department of Transportation. Ken Mead, the DOT Inspector General, indicates that 37% of Mexican trucks are removed from service, which is a 50% increase over the amount of U.S. trucks removed from service. How can we dispute these facts?

All we should ask is that the same regulations governing U.S. carriers govern all carriers crossing in to the U.S. and that these regulations be adequately enforced. The American people expect this basic safety protection from us, and I will fully support efforts to provide it.