

ANTI-SAFETY, SPECIAL INTEREST TRUCK PROVISION FOR MAINE AND VERMONT HAS NO PLACE IN THE CONTINUING RESOLUTION. CONSUMER, HEALTH, SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS, AND TRUCK CRASH VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS STRONGLY OPPOSE EXTENDING THE FEDERAL TRUCK WEIGHT EXEMPTIONS.

September 21, 2010

Dear Member of the Senate Appropriations Committee:

As the leading national, state and local consumer, health, safety and environmental advocates as well as families of truck crash victims and survivors, we urge you to reject extending the Maine and Vermont one-year overweight truck pilot programs in the Continuing Resolution to fund federal agencies through the elections. **There is no justification for a special interest provision that jeopardizes the health and safety of families in this bill.** Every year on average, approximately 4,000 people are killed and 100,000 more sustain injuries in truck-involved crashes. In two-vehicle crashes, between a large truck and a passenger vehicle, 97 percent of the deaths were occupants of the passenger vehicle. Our nation can and must do better to protect all who travel on our roads.

In the FY 2010 appropriations bill, a provision was slipped into the bill allowing Maine and Vermont motor carriers to circumvent the federal truck weight limit of 80,000 pounds and operate trucks as heavy as 100,000 pounds on all Interstate highways and bridges. There have been no public hearings on the issue and there has been no analysis of potential catastrophic safety and infrastructure problems. The exemptions for Maine and Vermont from the federal truck weight limit are lethal experiments that threaten the safety of families, the structural integrity of roads and bridges and a balanced freight transportation system.

Bigger Trucks are More Dangerous and Deadly: Large trucks make up only about 3 percent of all registered vehicles but are involved in approximately 12 percent of *all* annual motor vehicle crash fatalities. Bigger trucks take longer to stop, about the length of a football field. In fact, a 100,000 pound truck takes 25 percent longer to stop than an 80,000 pound truck according to federal government data.

The trucking industry argues that bigger, heavier trucks will improve safety in Maine and Vermont because heavier trucks will result in fewer trucks, but nothing could be further from the truth. According to statistics from the U.S. Bureau of the Census and the Federal Highway Administration, increases in truck sizes and weights always result in *more, not fewer*, bigger and heavier trucks than before.

In the past 10 years, more than 300 people have died in large truck crashes in Maine and Vermont. Truck crashes are dangerous and deadly, and allowing bigger and heavier trucks will expose innocent motorists to more such crashes. A few of the recent catastrophic crashes include one on January 25, 2010 in which two people were killed, a truck driver and the occupant of a passenger vehicle crushed between both trucks, after two milk tank trucks collided on Interstate 89 in Vermont, closing the Interstate in both directions for over 3 hours. In Maine shortly after 8:30 a.m. on July 26, 2010, a semi turned into the path of a minivan traveling on Route 4. The occupants of the minivan were seriously injured. On September 13, 2010 at 5:30 p.m., a tanker and car collided in Vermont. The passenger of the car was trapped for two hours before emergency workers were able to extricate him. He was airlifted to Dartmouth Hospital with serious injuries.

Extending the Maine and Vermont Truck Exemptions Affects Other States: Supporters of the Maine and Vermont truck weight exemptions claim that a permanent truck weight exemption is necessary because the federal weight limit of 80,000 pounds places Maine and Vermont at a “regional disadvantage.” However, by securing permanent exemptions for Maine and Vermont, the trucking industry is laying the groundwork for other states to request similar exemptions from the federal truck weight limit. The strategy of the trucking industry has remained the same for years – pressure state after state to increase weight limits and eventually, Congress will be forced to open the entire federal Interstate System to bigger, heavier, more dangerous and destructive trucks.

Bigger, Heavier Trucks Will Further Destroy Maine and Vermont Roads and Bridges: Maine and Vermont have a chronic backlog of unmet highway needs and allowing bigger, heavier trucks on the highways permanently will further jeopardize the safety of motorists. The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) gave Maine a “D- grade” in 2009 for its roads and bridges – 36% of Maine’s bridges are structurally deficient or functionally obsolete and 29% of Maine’s major roads are in poor or mediocre condition. Similarly, the ASCE reports that 39% of Vermont’s bridges are structurally deficient or functionally obsolete and 40% of major roads are in poor or mediocre condition.

In fact, an analysis by the Federal Highway Administration of Maine’s interstate bridges indicates three-quarters are overstressed with the additional weights. Maine has been warned that seven (7) interstate bridges could be stressed beyond yield point and that they could structurally fail. Allowing overweight trucks up to 100,000 pounds on the remaining portion of I-95 north of Augusta, Maine, could trigger a major bridge collapse on the magnitude of the 2007 disaster of the I-35 bridge in Minnesota involving 100 vehicles, killing 13 and injuring nearly a hundred people, including 22 children. No one thought such a tragedy could happen in Minnesota. It could happen in Maine or Vermont.

In addition, bigger, overweight trucks will further bankrupt Maine and Vermont bridge repair and maintenance. According to TRIP, a national transportation research group, Maine faces a \$3.3 billion gap in needed funding over the next ten years to allow the state to significantly improve road and bridge conditions, enhance economic development opportunities, improve mobility and enhance traffic safety. In Vermont, driving on roads in need of repair costs motorists \$171 million a year in extra vehicle repairs and operating costs – \$331 per motorist, according to the ASCE.

Bigger, Heavier Trucks Threaten a Balanced, Multi-modal Freight Transportation System: Vermont’s and Maine’s approach to freight transportation needs contradicts national freight policy proposals to create a more balanced, multi-modal system for moving goods. Allowing trucks to carry excessive loads not only threatens safety and infrastructure but also is a direct threat to the economic viability of regional railroads. There is currently a crisis surrounding the Montreal, Maine & Atlantic Railway, a freight railroad company that has served the region for more than a century carrying potatoes, paper, lumber and countless other products. Maine officials are scrambling for state and federal funding to assist this struggling railroad company, which operates on over 745 miles of track and affects the livelihoods of major businesses and hundreds of Maine families. Yet, at the same time, state officials are promoting trucking policies that undermine the economic viability of freight rail transportation. In short, taxpayers are being asked to pay for the damage and destruction caused by overweight trucks as well as to support a regional railroad because it cannot fairly compete with subsidized, overweight trucks.

You have an opportunity to save lives and protect our nation’s infrastructure investments. Old-style backroom politics and special interest provisions have no place in this bill. We urge you to reject an extension of the special interest truck weight exemptions for Maine and Vermont.

Sincerely,

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