

Remarks of Linda Wilburn
Press Conference on the Safe Highways and Infrastructure Protection Act (SHIPA)
May 3, 2011
Washington, D.C.

Hello, my name is Linda Wilburn and I am a Board member of Parents Against Tired Truckers. I am going to share with you today the top ten worst states for truck crash fatalities, including my home state of Oklahoma. But first, I am going to share with you my story.

My son Orbie was driving home from college in September 2002 when he had to stop behind a stalled vehicle. A semi-trailer truck going 75 mph crashed into the back of his car and knocked it into the rear of another truck. Orbie's car exploded killing him instantly. No apparent attempt to slow down or stop was made by the truck driver who had repeatedly falsified logs and violated safety procedures.

What happened to my son was not an accident, and unfortunately these senseless incidents happen every day in America, and in the following states, far too often. Truck crashes killed more than 4,000 people in 2010 on our nation's highways. Many here today have suffered tremendous injuries and have lost a family member to a preventable tragedy. We must enact safety legislation now which will protect our loved ones from being killed and injured every day in truck crashes on our nation's roadways.

The top ten worst states for truck crash fatalities are:

1. North Dakota
2. Arkansas
3. Oklahoma
4. Kentucky
5. Montana
6. Nebraska
7. Iowa
8. Kansas
9. Mississippi
10. Wyoming

I am saddened to see my home state of Oklahoma so high on the list and will be contacting and working with my local legislators and transportation agencies to improve our standing. My focus will be on six issues which are so vital to the health and safety of our families nationwide, as well as in Oklahoma.

Bigger, heavier trucks are significantly more dangerous in crashes as well as more damaging to the infrastructure of our roadways and bridges. I support the Safe Highways Infrastructure and Preservation Act which would extend size and weight protections to the National Highway and Interstate systems as well as maintain the freeze on longer combination vehicles.

It has been 30 years since minimum levels of insurance for trucks and motor carriers have been increased and they are woefully deficient. I urge immediate increases as well as enacting legislation which would provide for evaluation and increases on a periodic basis.

A truck traveling at 65 miles per hour has nearly twice the force of impact in a crash than at 55 mph and is more likely to jackknife or rollover. In order to limit speeding on our highways, I support efforts to require speed governors to be set at a maximum of 65 mph.

All trucks and trailers should be required to be equipped with velocity-sensitive, energy-absorbing rear and side impact guards, installed low to the ground, in order to prevent underride crashes. These are the most dangerous crashes because when an underride guard fails, the point of impact is a person's head. The safety technology for underride guards is proven and available. Let's require it on all of our trucks and trailers now.

Recently, our nation was stunned to learn that an air traffic controller fell asleep while on duty at Reagan National Airport. Even though, no one was hurt, people were completely outraged. Yet, this well-deserved concern for aviation travel safety does not ring the same alarms when it comes to motor carrier safety. Driver fatigue is a major factor in fatal truck crashes. I support the proposed Hours of Service rule which would limit consecutive driving hours to 10 maximum and I support the mandating of Electronic On-Board Recorders (EOBRs) in all commercial motor vehicles to make enforcement of this rule more efficient and effective. I want to see the urgency to evaluate standards and make immediate changes that we saw with the aviation industry's close call brought to the issue of truck safety. Making these changes right now will save lives every single day of the year.

Thank you.