

Remarks of Vicki Johnson
Press Conference on the Safe Highways and Infrastructure Protection Act (SHIPA)
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Washington, DC

Good morning. I am Vicki Johnson. On October 1, 2009, my entire world was loaded up into a four door pick-up truck on our way to the beach for a long overdue vacation; my husband, Curt, my two stepchildren, Cody and Crystal, and our little girl, Abbey. My kids couldn't wait to put their toes in the sand.

We were headed across a bridge near Florence, South Carolina, when we noticed a stalled dump truck in the right lane. We found ourselves stuck behind it, unable to get into the left lane because of traffic.

As we sat there, my husband hollered out "y'all brace yourselves here comes something big and fast." Those were his last words before we were rear-ended by a large truck and my world turned black. Curt and Crystal died at the scene. It was only by the grace of God that Abbey, Cody and I survived.

Families like mine traveling in passenger vehicles, die in record numbers in collisions with large trucks because of the great difference in weight. In two-vehicle crashes involving passenger vehicles and large trucks, 98 percent of the fatalities were occupants of the passenger vehicles. Allowing increases to truck weight and size limits will exacerbate this already deadly imbalance.

It is bad enough that truck crash fatalities are on the rise; truck size and weight increases will only make matters worse. In 2010, truck crash fatalities increased by 9%, and then went up again in 2011. Big rigs carrying close to the current Federal Limit, between 65,000 and 80,000 lbs., are already twice as likely to be involved in a fatal crash as trucks carrying less than 50,000 lbs. Compared to single-trailer trucks, double-trailer trucks are 32% more often involved in fatal crashes and 200% more likely to be in interstate highway crashes.

Adding weight to trucks with other safety deficiencies will result in more and deadlier crashes. Unmaintained braking systems are already a leading factor in truck crashes. Brakes have been cited as a factor in nearly 30% of all truck crashes. Allowing bigger, heavier trucks will amplify the severity of collisions occurring when brakes under-perform from lack of maintenance. Fatigue and inattention are also leading factors in truck crashes, and likely contributed to my family's crash. The addition of weight will produce more forces and result in more destruction in fatigue related crashes.

A big truck tore apart my family, but three of us survived. I don't know if any of us would have survived if the truck that hit us had been significantly heavier. That's why I'm here to urge Congress to pass the Safe Highways and Infrastructure Preservation Act. Our leaders in Washington need to listen to the American public and move quickly to pass this bill because someday, it might just be their entire world packed into a vehicle - their family, on their way to vacation - that is forever changed. Thank you.