

Statement of Daphne Izer, Founder of Parents Against Tired Truckers (PATT)

In Response to Senate Appropriations Committee Passing Industry-Written Provision to Rewrite Laws Affecting Truck Drivers' Hours of Service

April 21, 2016

For a third year now, the Senate Appropriations Committee has passed a spending bill that was co-authored by a select few trucking industry lobbyists. The industry-penned provision will increase the amount of hours truck drivers can work in a week and deprive truckers of a real weekend off. This is wrong on so many levels. Unfortunately, under the leadership of Senator Susan Collins, who chairs the subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development (THUD), this practice is business as usual.

It is outrageous that segments of the trucking industry have been able to use must-pass spending bills as legislative vehicles to drive their agendas that make public safety take a back seat. What is even worse is that the process by which industry lobbyists write and insert their provisions is often highly secretive. This has allowed moneyed interests to make changes to laws governing trucking without so much as a congressional hearing, any federal agency review, or any public input.

Lawmakers should treat safety interests with the same importance as corporate interests, but this has not been the case with this appropriations subcommittee. For instance, I have been advocating for more than 20 years for laws requiring large trucks to have electronic logging devices and heavy vehicle speed limiters. Yet, it took nearly two decades for a Final Rule on ELDs, and the Final Rule for speed limiters was just delayed for the 28th time since being initiated in 2006. When trucking industry lobbyists realized they miswrote language, however, it only took them several weeks to secure an immediate change to the law from their friend in the Senate.

This egregious exploitation of the appropriations process is an affront to truck safety and to the memory of the thousands of Americans, including my son Jeff, who were needlessly killed in large truck crashes. With the one year anniversary of the truck crash that killed the five Georgia Southern University nursing students falling one day after this vote, I want to convey my sincerest sympathy to the families of Emily Clark, Catherine "McKay" Pittman, Caitlyn N. Baggett, Abbie L. Deloach, and Morgan J. Bass. Their deaths should serve as grave reminder that lawmakers need to do much more to combat the role that issues like fatigue play in causing truck crashes, including reversing the provision that was just passed.

It is time for Senator Collins to stop holding this "back door" open for industry insiders to have uninhibited access to write rules and laws that are in their best interest. Instead, she should look at the facts, listen to general public, and use a transparent process.