

Statement of Joan Claybrook

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As Yogi Berra once said, “It’s like déjà vu all over again.” Another year, another appropriations bill, and another well-financed effort by powerful trucking interests to advance their economic agenda. For the third consecutive year, the Senate and House Appropriations Committees have put out a welcome mat for any rollbacks, repeals, revisions and rejections of truck safety rules. It’s corporate welfare for the trucking companies and corporate warfare on public safety. The result will be more crashes caused by tired truckers and needless deaths and serious injuries of more innocent loved ones like those you have just heard about.

Yesterday, the National Transportation Safety Board released its findings on the Amtrak crash that tragically killed eight people. Before today is over, 10 people will be killed in truck crashes and according to the NTSB a third or more will involve truck driver fatigue. Before the year is over, approximately 4,000 people will die and another 100,000 will be injured in truck crashes. And, before Congress adjourns this session a spending bill will pass that completely ignores the mounting deaths and destruction on our roadways caused by big trucks driven by tired truckers.

The Senate has an opportunity right now to stand with the public and say no to trucking industry lobbyists. The Senate can pass an amendment introduced last night by Senators Blumenthal, Markey and Booker. I like to call their amendment “ok, we’ve had enough already” because the Blumenthal/Markey/Booker amendment would restore the Obama Hours of Service rule. It eliminates arbitrary and dangerous caps that increase driving hours, it stops lobbyists from cutting backroom deals with their friends in Congress and restores an open and transparent regulatory process where everyone can participate. It returns us to a rule that was designed to seriously address fatigue – both in terms of setting reasonable limits on driving and working and giving truck drivers sufficient time off for rest and recovery.

This morning the House Appropriations Subcommittee takes up their version of the FY2017 THUD appropriations bill. Just like Senator Susan Collins, Chairman Rogers and Subcommittee Chairman Diaz-Balart have let trucking interests include a provision that restores the Bush HOS rule. This rule was overturned twice by the Court of Appeals because the excessively long driving hours and the ridiculously short rest hours were not based on science. Again, these Members are willing to reinstate a rule that we know was causing truck drivers to fall asleep behind the wheel and drive drowsy. We are working with our allies on the House Appropriations Committee to strip the bill of the hours of service amendment as well as the other anti-truck safety provisions loaded onto the bill.

The consequences of what Congress will do in the next few days have life and death impacts for families sharing the road with big trucks. We urge the Senate to adopt the Blumenthal/Markey/Booker amendment, and we urge the House to strike the anti-safety provisions in their bill.