



**RUSSELL SWIFT STATEMENT, JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE  
Truck Safety Coalition & Advocates for Highway & Auto Safety  
Tuesday, June 15, 2021**

Good Afternoon. My name is Russ Swift and I am the Co-Chair of Parents Against Tired Truckers, known as P.A.T.T. We comprise one-half of the Truck Safety Coalition, along with Citizens for Reliable & Safe Highways (CRASH).

On 10 October 1993, my wife and I were watching the news about a truck Crash on the Maine turnpike where a truck driver fell asleep at the wheel and drove over a small car in the breakdown lane, killing four teenagers and seriously injuring another. As we watched we felt so sorry for the families who lost their children.

We could not imagine how they felt. Four days later it happened to us. Four days from now it could happen to you. Nearly 28 years ago, October 14, 1993, our 23-year-old son, Jasen, died a violent death, early in the morning on a dark road, because of breathtakingly bad judgment by a 17-year-old truck driver. The circumstances that led to his death have changed little since then.

Early in the morning on that day, Jasen and his friend, Dustin were driving to work at the USMC Mountain Warfare Training Center in Pickle Meadow. A semi-truck attempting to make an illegal U-turn had stalled across both lanes of the highway. Jasen and Dustin's car collided with the center of the trailer, sliding underneath the trailer, killing them both instantly.

Later we found out that the truck was being driven by a 17-year-old with a learner's permit from California while the legal owner/operator of the truck slept in the sleeping berth. Did I mention that the Crash happened in Nevada? The truck was not authorized to operate in interstate commerce, they neither maintained mandatory logbooks nor complied with the hours-of-service regulations, and the owner did not have the minimum required insurance. Shortly thereafter I joined P.A.T.T. and became fully aware of all the problems in the US Commercial Motor Vehicle (CMV) industry.

It is incomprehensible to me that Congress is yet again considering legislation allowing 18–20-year-olds to get behind the wheel of massive 18-wheelers

on interstate highways throughout the nation. Research confirming the dangers and risks of young drivers is clear and it is compelling:

- Young drivers 18–20 that are currently allowed to operate intrastate have Crash rates that are *four to six times higher* than those of more mature truck drivers.
- As the age of the truck driver decreases, involvement rates in large truck Crashes increase.
- CMV drivers under the age of 19 are *four times more likely* to be involved in fatal Crashes, and CMV drivers aged 19-20 are *six times more likely* to be involved in fatal Crashes.
- Even the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Agency (FMCSA) is on record for many years that there is no proof that the safety performance of younger drivers would be sufficiently close to that of older, more mature drivers.
- Car rental agencies won't rent to drivers under 23. Why would we want them driving an 80,000-pound tractor-trailer on our roads?

These are solid statistics and facts. Every day of our lives, my wife and I get to put a face on those statistics, the face of Jasen, our son, who lost his life because so many chilling, wrong decisions were made that fateful day by a teenage trucker, and because policymakers did not stand up to the industry that allowed -and currently promotes - the possibility of such irresponsible, deadly, behavior to become even more commonplace.

Despite all this, some lawmakers support allowing the industry to open the national interstate gates to teen-aged truckers. This is a misguided decision, based on a perceived shortage of truck drivers, to go down a highly precarious road, especially as driving a truck is the most dangerous profession in the United States, at any age. Rather than taking realistic steps to make truck driving safer for drivers and the motoring public, the industry fully disregards safety risks by trying to put teens at the wheel of massive rigs on the interstates.

I leave you with a few more troubling facts:

- Truck Crash deaths and injuries have increased nearly 50% since 2009.
- Over 5,000 people were killed and 159,000 more injured in 2019 alone.
- In fatal truck Crashes involving a car, 97% of the deaths are the occupants of the passenger vehicle.
- Teen Truckers will NOT make our roads safer.

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