

July 29, 2008

WASHINGTON, DC – Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-OR), Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Highways and Transit, Rep. James Oberstar (D-MN), Chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Rep. John Mica (R-FL), Ranking Member on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and Rep. John Duncan (R-TN), Ranking Member on the House Subcommittee on Highways and Transit today stood up for the safety of Americans when they introduced H.R. 6630, legislation to stop the Department of Transportation (DOT) from fully opening the U.S. border to Mexican trucks.

"As we approach the end of the one year Mexican truck demonstration program, I have introduced bipartisan legislation that will terminate the program and force DOT to fully evaluate the results before it rushes to open the border. All along DOT has said this would be a one year pilot so I'm holding them to their word," DeFazio said. "DOT needs to look at how much this pilot has cost and the impact it has had on overall motor carrier safety. This Administration has been hell-bent on opening up our border but over the past year has failed to show they can adequately inspect Mexican carriers while also maintaining a robust U.S. safety inspection program. The safety of the traveling public must come first -- before the Administration's fantasies about free trade."

"When DOT insisted on moving ahead with a one-year pilot program, it disregarded Congressional objections and concerns over safety. Strong bi-partisan majorities in both the House and Senate tried to shut the program down, but DOT forged ahead, in violation of the spirit of the law and against the express will of Congress," Oberstar said. "The Secretary has said in very clear terms that DOT's experiment would be limited to one year. This bill will ensure that the Administration keeps its word."

Last year, Secretary of Transportation Peters announced the Administration's intent to implement a one-year pilot program to allow up to 100 trucking companies from Mexico full access to U.S. highways. However, DOT has made clear from the beginning that at the conclusion of the one-year pilot the US-Mexico border will be permanently open to Mexican trucks without any analysis of the impacts of the program. For instance, while the demonstration program is supposed to terminate after one year, DOT issued provisional operating authority to pilot participants for 18 months.

There has been a strong bi-partisan Congressional objection to the program dating back to before the pilot began, stemming from Mexico's less stringent regulations on hours-of-service, vehicle safety, and driver training and licensing. In May of 2007, the House voted overwhelmingly, 411-3, to pass H.R. 1773, the Safe American Roads Act of 2007, legislation that would have extended the pilot program to three years and ensured that DOT establishes a process to analyze the impact of allowing Mexican trucks on our nation's roadways, before the border is completely opened. Provisions were also included in the FY 2007 Iraq War Supplemental spending bill (P.L. 110-28) to impose strict measures to ensure that the pilot program adheres to safety and security guidelines and that its progress is assessed by an independent panel. And last July, the House approved an amendment offered by Rep. DeFazio to prohibit the use of federal funds to implement the pilot program. The amendment was offered to H.R. 3074, the FY 2008 Transportation-HUD Appropriations Act and was approved by a voice vote. Similar language was included in the final FY 2008 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 110-161), however, the Administration chose to ignore that language and continued with the pilot anyway.

"Given the record of DOT, without further Congressional action it can be assumed they will fully open the border to Mexican trucks without addressing significant safety concerns," DeFazio said. "This legislation is necessary for the protection of the traveling American public."