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Cross Border Truck Safety Inspection Program

Speech

**REMARKS FOR
THE HONORABLE MARY E. PETERS
SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION**

**MEXICAN TRUCKS NEWS CONFERENCE
EL PASO, TX**

**FEBRUARY 23, 2007
9:30 AM**

Good morning, everyone.

We are here today to announce that the United States and Mexico are beginning a cross-border trucking pilot program that will build on our nation's legacy of seizing opportunity, embracing trade, and leading the world as an economic superpower, while protecting safety, security, and the environment.

As President Bush made clear earlier this month in his *State of the Economy* address, the United States is the envy of the world when it comes to job growth, economic expansion, and quality of life.

Our country has never shied away from opportunities to compete, to open new markets, and to trade with the world.

Our ancestors fought and died to keep the world's trade free. Our forefathers saw the value in dropping tariffs and opening the flow of capital across our borders. And during the dark days of the Cold War, our parents held firm in the belief that free markets and free trade would win over command and control economies every time. And they were right.

If we are to continue to thrive, we must continue to embrace economic opportunity. This is especially true here at the border, where trade is an essential part of economic life.

New Mexico's Governor, Bill Richardson, has talked about "the need for more border trade and more border contact," noting "we're so close to Mexico here, it's almost as if there's an intermingling of countries."

And Texas Governor Rick Perry has observed, "When we allow for the free flow of commerce, energy, and ideas, jobs and opportunity are created on both sides of our shared border."

That is why I am here today. Now that safety and security programs are in place, the time has come for us to move forward on a long-standing promise with Mexico by taking the trucking provision of the North American Free Trade Agreement off hold.

Having Mexican trucks cross the United States border is nothing new. In fact, until 1982, trucks from Mexico could drive anywhere in the country. Since that time, Mexican trucks have been restricted to the border commercial zones in California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas.

As a result, every day thousands of Mexican trucks must drive across our border, through cities like El Paso, and then come to a stop at an imaginary line. There, these trucks must sit idle until a U.S. truck arrives and the cargo is switched from one to the other.

Even worse, U.S. trucks cannot even go into Mexico. It is a process that wastes precious time, energy, and money.

But that is about to change. Today, I am announcing a limited, year-long demonstration program that will permit up to 100 Mexican trucking companies to make deliveries beyond the commercial zones. An equal number of U.S. trucking companies will be able to cross the border and compete in the Mexican marketplace for the first time ever.

While seizing commercial opportunities is important, doing it safely is vital. That is why I traveled to Monterrey, Mexico, yesterday to announce that U.S. inspectors will conduct in-person safety audits to make sure that participating Mexican companies meet every United States safety regulation on the books.

The inspection program is tough, and it is meant to ensure safe operation of trucks crossing our border. Drivers must have a valid commercial driver's license, carry proof that they are medically fit, and comply with United States hours-of-service rules. And they must be able to understand and respond in English to questions and directions from inspectors.

The trucks must be insured by a U.S.-licensed firm. And from hood to tail-lamps, they must meet United States safety standards, including brakes, turn signals, and cargo-securing equipment.

Companies that satisfy these safety standards and are accepted into the demonstration program will be allowed to operate beyond the border areas to make international deliveries and pick-ups only. Mexican trucks will not be able to pick up goods in one U.S. city for delivery to another. And no trucks hauling hazardous materials or buses carrying passengers will be involved.

In about 60 days, when the initial safety audits are done and proof-of-insurance verified, the first Mexican trucks to be authorized under the pilot program will begin traveling beyond the border areas.

As we move forward with this test program, let me assure you – safety will be the top priority.

In 2001, the Congress approved and President Bush signed legislation spelling out 22 safety requirements that had to be met before putting this program in operation. They are comprehensive. And I can tell you

today that the Department's independent Inspector General has certified that each and every one of them has been met.

We are ready with modern inspection facilities, and we have hired and trained hundreds of inspectors.

All told, 540 federal and state inspectors are already on the job, standing by to screen trucks coming across the border from Mexico to ensure that both the drivers and their vehicles are safe to make deliveries in the United States.

And under our safety inspection plan, each and every truck in the demonstration program will be checked, and any unsafe vehicle or unfit driver will be taken off the road.

Our records show that Mexican trucks currently operating in the commercial zone are as safe as the trucks operated by companies here in the United States. We know this because federal and state inspectors are already screening the trucks crossing into our country from Mexico.

We have years of experience, we have a rigorous safety inspection plan in place, and we have the facilities and the trained professionals to carry it out.

Through this new pilot program, we are finding a better way to do business with one of this nation's largest trading partners, and in doing so, bringing U.S. drivers more opportunity, U.S. consumers more buying power, and the U.S. economy even more momentum.

We will take your questions about this demonstration program in just a few minutes.

But first, I have invited Mexican Secretary of Communications and Transportation Luis Tellez, Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Jackson, and Deputy Secretary of Commerce Dr. David Sampson to address the important security, commerce, and trade issues associated with this trucking demonstration program.

Secretary Tellez ...

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