

Remarks to the  
NAFTA Land Transportation Conference

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Joseph M. Clapp  
Administrator  
Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration

Good afternoon. I am very pleased to be here. This has been an extraordinary gathering of leaders from three countries, both in the public and private sector, who have come together with one purpose – to facilitate the implementation of the land transportation provisions of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

I also wish to acknowledge the personal involvement and commitment of my counterparts in Mexico and Canada for their assistance in the development and presentation of this conference. Without their help, this remarkable gathering could not have taken place.

So, after a long week of meetings in which you have heard, in probably excruciating detail, the requirements necessary to begin truck and bus operations in our respective countries, what do I have to add?

Well, I am here to reiterate that we, at the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, are here to ensure that the President's

goal of implementing the truck and bus provisions of NAFTA is achieved smoothly and safely. Our objective is, quite simply, to make the system work. We are here to make this work.

It has taken us a rather long time to get here – but now the effort of many years has come to fruition and the cross-border land transportation provisions of NAFTA are about to become a reality. In the course of this 10-year journey, much of the discussion has revolved around safety. And that is as it should be. We all, whether we are government officials or private businessmen and businesswomen, have a responsibility to our fellow citizens to ensure that commercial vehicle operations are conducted safely. In addition, safety is good business.

In that regard, I know a little of which I speak. I spent my entire career, (before Secretary Mineta, in one of his weaker moments, persuaded me to take this job) in the trucking business. In fact, my first managerial assignment in the world of work, some thirty years ago, was that of Director of Safety for an up-and-coming tank truck carrier in North Carolina. In that job, I

experienced something, which I now recognize, was a compliance review. The Federal Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety – a predecessor to the agency I now head, conducted it.

It was then that I first met Ernest Cox, Director of the Bureau. I can still see that slight, white-haired gentleman pointing his bony finger at me. There was nothing ambiguous in his message.

As the regulator, he had the stick. He could impose penalties; he could also negatively impact future operating authority grants. He could put my company out of business.

As you can imagine, he had my attention. But what convinced me, what impacted my future behavior, was the clear conviction of the man. His integrity and clarity of purpose were unmistakable.

You just knew that with Ernie Cox, it wasn't really so much about regulations, or penalties, or putting companies out of

business. It was really about making a difference – a difference that saved lives.

Because of Ernie Cox, I became a better safety director – and my company became a better company.

That is the message I wish to bring to all of you today. The Safety Audits we will be conducting prior to the granting of operating authority, the Compliance Reviews we will conduct later, and the inspections we will carry out at the roadside, should not be considered obstacles to entry. In fact, they are tools – tools that can and should be used to make your company a better and safer company. And if you know the rules and comply with them, you will also be a more productive and profitable company.

As I said, we are committed to opening the border and opening it safely. While initially, the requirements may seem both numerous and confusing, in time they will become regularized and matter of fact. In the interim however, in order to help

alleviate that initial confusion, the Office of the Secretary will coordinate a team that will meet with our Mexican counterparts on a monthly basis during the implementation period to raise issues and resolve any misunderstandings. In addition, the FMCSA staff in the applications center, as well as our staff of the inspectors and auditors will all be bilingual. I am extremely hopeful that with this team of individuals, both at the policy level and the operational level, we can resolve any issues and answer any questions in a prompt and satisfactory manner.

The opening of the southern border presents tremendous trade opportunities for all of our countries. As Deputy Secretary Michael Jackson said when he spoke to you earlier in the week, “transportation is the lynchpin of trade.” The opening of the border represents the elimination of what was a transportation barrier to trade. Because of the tremendous work done by our respective Departments of Transportation, we have ensured that the commercial vehicles which handle that trade will operate safely.

Thank you very much, and I would be happy to entertain questions.

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