

families can best decide—and not the bureaucrats in Washington.

It is my belief that with families getting to keep more of their hard-earned paycheck—the quiet talks at the kitchen table, after the children have been put to bed, will be more about opportunities and possibilities rather than fears and concerns.

Mr. President, I hope this speech will make those who have recently called for a tax increase to think again. My hope is that they may now better appreciate the enormous benefits of this legislation and think long and hard before they try to undermine its accomplishments.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Montana.

MEXICAN TRUCKS

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss the issue of Mexican trucks.

I want to applaud Senator MURRAY and Senator SHELBY for their efforts to craft a common-sense solution on this issue. Their provision would ensure strong safety requirements and would be consistent with our obligations under NAFTA.

As most people are well aware, the last Administration delayed opening the border to Mexican trucks because of serious safety concerns.

Indeed, numerous reports have documented these concerns—failing brakes, overweight trucks, and uninsured, unlicensed drivers—to name just a few.

The most recent figures of the Department of Transportation indicate that Mexican trucks are much more likely to be ordered off the road for severe safety deficiencies than either U.S. or Canadian trucks.

While a NAFTA arbitration panel has ruled that the United States must initiate efforts to open the border to these trucks, we need to be clear about what the panel has said.

The panel indicated:

The United States may not be required to treat applications from Mexican trucking firms in exactly the same manner as applications from United States or Canadian firms. . . . U.S. authorities are responsible for the safe operations of trucks within U.S. territory, whether ownership is United States, Canadian, or Mexican.

Moreover, the panel also indicated that U.S. compliance with its NAFTA obligations “would not necessarily require providing favorable consideration to all or to any specific number of applications” for Mexican trucks so long as these applications are reviewed, “on a case-by-case basis.”

In other words, the U.S. government is well within its rights to impose standards it considers necessary to ensure that our highways are safe.

The Administration has suggested that it is seeking to treat U.S., Mexican, and Canadian trucks in the same way—but we are not required to treat them in the same way. That’s what the NAFTA panel said.

With Mexican trucks, there are greater safety risks. And where there are greater safety risks, we can—and must—impose stricter safety standards.

I yield the floor.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRANSPORTATION APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I rise to speak on the issue of the cloture vote that is upcoming. I also rise to speak on the amendment that is pending called the Murray-Shelby amendment, which is in violation of NAFTA.

As a person who believes very much in reducing barriers to trade between countries—and particularly for the benefit of America because other countries have much higher barriers than the United States—as we bring down barriers to trade and other countries, going to our level, it is obviously going to help the United States have a more level playing field in order to export our products and to be able to do it in a way that creates jobs in America. We all know export-related jobs are jobs that pay 15 percent above the national average.

While we have had a very big expansion in trade as a result of the North American Free Trade Agreement between the countries of Canada, the United States, and Mexico, we now have a rider on this bill providing an opportunity to put in place some restrictions which may in fact bring retaliatory action on the part of Mexico.

Obviously, when I hear a threat against American agricultural products as one form of retaliation, it gets my attention, being from an agricultural State, particularly when we work so hard to get lower barriers on trade in these international agreements. Quite frankly, barriers to trade are much greater on agriculture than they are for manufactured products and for services, because the worldwide tariff on agricultural products is 45 percent, whereas for most other products the average is about 10 percent to 12 percent.

U.S. tariffs and obstacles to trade are very low in agriculture compared to other countries.

As indicated in a letter, which I co-signed, to our colleagues for them to consider when voting on this provision of the bill, I am as concerned about safety of trucks from other countries using our highways. But I also understand that our Department of Transportation is also concerned about that

and is going to put in place very shortly the very successful California system for inspection of trucks so we can make sure the trucks and drivers from other countries are using our highways safely.

But it was suggested yesterday by the Economic Minister of Mexico that if the Senate approves this provision and it becomes law, as the Reuters news article of yesterday indicated, “It would leave us”—meaning the country of Mexico—“with no other recourse than to take measures against the United States.” The Economic Minister of Mexico, according to this report, said one option would be to block imports of high-fructose corn syrup from the United States.

This issue has already been one source of friction between our two countries. Mexico has already been placing prohibitive tariffs on our sweeteners. The United States won a World Trade Organization decision against Mexico on this issue. We will be putting in jeopardy the compliance of that measure if they retaliate.

I don’t know why any Member of the Senate from an agricultural State—a very important industry in their respective States—would want to vote in support of the Shelby-Murray provision if there were a chance of retaliation against agricultural products, particularly those from the Middle West where corn is such an important agricultural product, and put in jeopardy our exports to China along the lines of the threat of the Economic Minister of Mexico.

I call upon Members of both parties who understand the importance of agriculture and understand the importance of our ability to export our agricultural production. We produce 40 percent more than we consume domestically, and the profitability of agriculture is very much tied to exports. Why would they want to do anything that would bring retaliation against American agriculture, particularly in the Midwest with products such as corn?

I hope every Member in every state where agriculture is an important product, where they are concerned about profitability of agriculture, and where they are particularly concerned about the ability to export our products, will consider the threat of the Economic Minister of Mexico and what they might do in retaliation. We ought to abide by the spirit of the North American Free Trade Agreement and reject the provisions of the appropriations bill that would restrict some of the international obligations of the United States.

I hope every Member will make sure they see their vote as a vote that could negatively affect American agriculture, particularly as it affects corn farmers in America. Why would anybody want to hurt American agriculture by voting for this provision?

American agriculture has benefited from the North American Free Trade