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4-29-1971

Congressional Record S. 5760-61 - Farm Vehicle Driver Qualifications

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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Mansfield, Mike 1903-2001, "Congressional Record S. 5760-61 - Farm Vehicle Driver Qualifications" (1971). *Mike Mansfield Speeches, Statements and Interviews*. 975.
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with large agriculture interests have been receiving hundreds and thousands of letters opposing motor carrier safety regulations for farm vehicle operators. This group has been historically exempted. The new regulations, if approved, would require that every farmer, member of his family, or employee driving trucks in interstate commerce would have to be 21 years of age and meet a number of other requirements. I find it difficult to understand why this group is being brought under these regulations. It would place a great financial burden on the small farmers and ranchers. Traditionally, farmers have depended upon family members and young people hired to drive farm vehicles. It must be remembered that these young people are raised with the proper respect for the operation and use of these vehicles. In fact, I think the safety record is quite high in this area. At a time when we are attempting to place additional responsibilities on our young people, the Department of Transportation is working in the opposite direction.

I have addressed myself to the Secretary of Transportation on this matter and I ask that my letter by printed in the RECORD at the conclusion of my remarks.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

(See exhibit 1.)

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, the farmers and ranchers of the Nation are faced with some extremely difficult problems today. The agricultural economy has not kept up with the rest of the Nation and yet the Department of Transportation wants to place some additional burdens on these people. I understand that some of the farm groups are attempting to work out a compromise in this matter, and I do hope that the Department will, at the least, agree to an exemption for lightweight farm vehicles.

In conclusion, I ask unanimous consent to have an editorial from the Park County News of April 14, 1971, printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the editorial was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

ANOTHER PENALTY FOR FARMERS

American ranchers and farmers likely will get "clipped" again, will have to pay more, go through a lot more "red tape" and some will be prohibited from driving their own trucks, regulations, effective July 1, 1971 of the U.S. Department of Transportation's Department of Motor Carrier Safety, indicate.

The Enterprise is indebted to Mr. and Mrs. J. E. Frame of Wilsall for calling this to our attention. Stiffening state driver license regulations make sense, but to add these new Uncle Sam regulations hardly makes sense at a time when Agriculture and Ranching are finding it more and more difficult to make ends meet.

The new regulations include: Drivers must be at least 21; must carry a medical certificate evidencing they meet prescribed physical requirements; must pass a road test; must take a federal safety rule test; farmers or ranchers must see that employees' records of accidents, requirements are on file at all times.

The American Farm Bureau, National Grange and other farm organizations have protested, but there needs to be a "grass roots movement" to protest, via the Congressional delegations, for relief from such stupidity.

FARM VEHICLE DRIVER QUALIFICATIONS

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, those of us in the Congress representing States

The Farm Bureau terms the proposed regulations "Unwarranted" on the basis of the safety record of farmer-drivers, citing actuarial data of the National Association of Independent Insurers that the amount of bodily injury claims paid per farm truck policy is about one-third the amount paid per policy for all non-fleet trucks.

Before the Federal Bureaucracy hangs another noose around your neck to hamstring farmers and ranchers it is up to them to fight. Write a letter or send a copy of this to Senators Mike Mansfield and Lee Metcalf and Congressmen Dick Shoup and John Melcher in Washington. Do it today. Don't wish you had protested after it is too late.

EXHIBIT 1

APRIL 29, 1971.

HON. JOHN VOLPE,
Secretary, Department of Transportation,
Washington, D.C.

DEAR MR. SECRETARY: In recent weeks I have received hundreds of letters from farmers, ranchers and other citizens in Montana protesting the new driver qualifications being considered by the Department of Transportation. The regulations, as I understand them, would bring farm vehicles under the motor carrier safety regulations and would require that a farmer, members of his family or employee driving a truck in interstate commerce would have to be 21 years of age and have met a number of other requirements.

The adoption of this rule would place an extreme hardship on many farmers and ranchers in a State like Montana. As you know, many farm families have relied upon their sons for help after they had met the State driving qualifications. To bring farm vehicles under the Federal regulations would make it very difficult and would place additional financial burdens on this small type of operation.

It seems strange that at a time when we are lowering the voting age and giving adult privileges to young people at the age of 18, the Department of Transportation would turn around and impose this 21-year-old restriction. I am not aware of any statistics indicating that young drivers of farm vehicles are any more irresponsible than their elders. We must not forget that these young people living on farms and ranches are brought up with proper knowledge and respect for the equipment.

I am informed that, because of the volume of complaints brought about by the proposed regulations, an effort is underway to bring about an accommodation between the Department and representative farm groups. I support this effort and believe that there should be an exemption at the least, for lightweight farm vehicles. Farmers and ranchers of my State are finding it difficult to compete economically under present conditions, and I see no reason why we should add these additional burdens.

I support efforts to impose reasonable driver qualifications in the interests of safety, but I feel that, in this instance, it is uncalled for and merely an extension of zealous, bureaucratic procedures. Your intercession with the Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety would be most appreciated.

With best personal wishes, I am

Sincerely yours,

MIKE MANSFIELD.

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, I agree completely with the distinguished chairman of the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry.

Let me reiterate that what we are doing is trying to break down established and needed patterns in the development of the farm economy. I use the word "development" advisedly because our farm

economy and our farm population is decreasing. The trend is toward the urban areas.

Mr. TALMADGE. Mr. President, will the distinguished majority leader yield at that point?

Mr. MANSFIELD. I am happy to yield to the distinguished chairman of the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. TALMADGE. I congratulate the distinguished minority leader on the statement he has just made. I concur fully with him in that regard.

When it was called to my attention that the Secretary of Transportation was about to make some drastic regulations in this regard, in my capacity as chairman of the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, I wrote the Secretary of Transportation protesting and asked him to reconsider the regulations that he proposed to issue.

As the able majority leader knows, most farm vehicles are used on the farms and are not used on paved roads of any kind. If the Secretary of Transportation applies regulations to members of farm families that drive their trucks incidentally on interstate highways, it will do irreparable damage to the agriculture of this Nation.