

Capitol Report

Senator Luann Ridgeway

March 29, 2007

Truck Drivers Should Understand English

Recent raids at a trucking company in Kansas City and a truck-driver training school in West Plains found that dozens of illegal immigrants had been fraudulently certified to operate tractor trailers on our state highways. Federal investigators say license examiners at these schools passed unqualified drivers or accepted fake documents to issue licenses. A number of these drivers then received certification to haul hazardous materials on our roadways.

I have proposed legislation to put an end to this fraudulent activity which threatens the safety of all Missouri motorists. My proposal prohibits the Director of Revenue from supplying or permitting the use of language interpreters in connection with the written and driving test for a commercial driver's license. The legislation has been added to a Senate transportation bill. The full Senate gave final approval to the bill on Friday, March 29, 2007.

I think it's extremely important that someone driving an 80,000-pound rig on our interstate highways have at least basic English skills. Truck drivers should be able to follow road signs, be able to comprehend warning signs and signals, and be able to read a map. My amendment will ensure that people who receive a commercial driver's license in Missouri can easily follow the rules of the road.

The issue goes back to 1997 when the Federal Highway Administration, which at the time was in charge of motor carrier safety, issued a notice of proposed rulemaking. Those provisions required that commercial vehicle drivers in interstate commerce be able to "read and speak the English language sufficiently to converse with the general public, understand highway traffic signs and signals, respond to official inquiries, and make entries on reports and records."

Ultimately, the proposed rule was not adopted, but the idea remains valid, especially in light of the raids in Kansas City and southern Missouri.

Given the heightened concerns over national security in the wake of 9-11, the issue is even more relevant now than it was a decade ago. English is currently used as the world-wide standard for aviation and is designed to promote safety. You wouldn't want to fly into an airport where the air traffic control tower sounded more like the Tower of Babel! A similar reliance on English should apply for obtaining a commercial driver's license (CDL). School bus drivers

must obtain a CDL. Your child's school bus driver should be able to read road signs and warnings. Furthermore a CDL is the basis for obtaining a hazardous materials hauling certificate. Some hazardous materials hauled over our public roadways could easily be used as a mobile bomb. You need to look no further than Oklahoma City to recall the grave damage a truck load of hazardous materials can cause. The intent of the English-only law is to advance public safety and prevent the fraudulent issuance of a commercial driver's license.

The legislation now progresses to the House for consideration. For more information on this or any other issue of concern, please give me a call. We always look forward to your comments!

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