



## **Cross-border trucks a comical tragedy**

**David Hendricks** - David Hendricks

The matter of Washington trying to revive U.S.-Mexico cross-border trucking as early as this month, after killing it in March, is as comical as it is serious.

It is serious because many U.S. producers are hurting. They lost their Mexican markets after Mexico's government imposed \$2.4 billion in trade sanctions on more than 90 U.S. products when Congress killed the cross-border test program.

The higher tariffs on U.S.-made products and agricultural goods made them uncompetitive in Mexico. Mexico had every right to punish the United States. According to the North American Free Trade Agreement, cross-border trucking should have started in 1995.

The U.S. producers are complaining to both the administration and their congressional representatives. The producers also are laying off workers.

President Barack Obama and U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood understand the damage done. They want to reverse it with either another limited pilot project or a broader, perhaps permanent, program in which Mexican long-haul truck fleets can deliver goods directly to the U.S. interior and U.S. trucks could do the same in Mexico.

Without cross-border trucking, carriers must stop at the border zone and drop their freight for another carrier from the home country to pick up, adding costs to delivered goods.

Here's the comical part: Obama, as a U.S. senator, and LaHood, as an Illinois congressman, both voted against the test program in 2007. They know, even now, Congress won't like any effort to restart it.

After the 2007 vote, the Bush administration started the program anyway in September that year, using a loophole. The program, inspired by a proposal from the San Antonio business community, lasted 18 months, without any safety problems.

The White House now is reviewing LaHood's proposal. Obama told the Mexican government during his April 16 visit to Mexico City he wanted to end the trade war with a new trucking program. The proposal would have been announced already except for the swine flu scare that started in late April.

"I think you're going to have members of Congress voting for this that voted against this before the tariffs," LaHood told Bloomberg News on May 21. "I hope we do it in June. We might as well strike while the iron is hot."

A few votes may switch, but who can honestly believe a majority of the Democrat-controlled Congress will approve restarting the project? That would anger the truck-driver unions claiming, without evidence, that Mexican trucks and drivers are unsafe, even though they must meet every requirement of U.S. drivers and trucks and more before receiving cross-border authorization. Competition is what the unions really want to avoid.

The freight dispute has become larger than just trucking. It's a painful thorn in U.S.-Mexico relations at a time when the United States and Mexico need to cooperate on bigger issues, such as immigration, drug-and-weapons smuggling and the flu.

The United States is trapped. Congress is not going to budge on cross-border trucking. Trapped the most are the U.S. manufacturers who lost their Mexican market and the workers employed by them. It would be funny if it didn't hurt so much.

*dhendricks@express-news.net*

**Find this article at:**

<http://www.mysanantonio.com/business/46765007.html>