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Campbell Soup Co. Backs Heavy Truck Bill

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CAMDEN, N.J. - The Campbell Soup Supply Co. is currently backing a Congressional bill aimed at allowing six-axle trucks to carry more weight on the highway.

The Safe and Efficient Transportation Act (H.R. 1799), introduced by Rep. Michael Michaud, D-Maine, and Rep. Jean Schmidt, R-Ohio, was initiated on March 30. If passed, the bill would allow trucks utilizing the interstate highway system to carry a gross weight of 97,000 pounds. Currently, five-axle trucks can carry a maximum gross weight of 80,000 pounds.

John Runyan, executive director of the Coalition for Transportation Productivity (CTP), a group of 120 companies advocating for the bill, explained the bill is aimed at making trucks heavier - not bigger. In order to support the added weight, Runyan explained the trucks would need to be upgraded to six axles.

Advocates of the bill point out the operation of the new, more efficient vehicles would allow trucking companies to make fewer trips when delivering goods. While Runyan noted the heavier loads would increase fuel use slightly, he said emissions would be cut, as would highway congestion and ultimately, truck-related accidents.

"When you lower your vehicle miles driven you lower your accident rate - it's almost a direct correlation," he said.

Runyan explained a similar law was passed in the United Kingdom in 2001 and, from that year until 2006, fatal truck-related accidents dropped by 35 percent. "That's something we're trying to replicate," he said.

The Campbell Soup Supply Co. is a major backer of this bill. If passed, the company would ship 41,000 fewer trucks nationwide, meaning 23 million fewer miles driven; 3.8 million gallons of fuel saved; and 38,956 tons of carbon emissions eliminated, according to data provided by the CTP.

"We support the bill because it would create savings for Campbell by allowing us to use fewer trucks to ship the same amount of goods, resulting in less fuel usage, fewer truck miles on highways and a lower carbon footprint," said Kelly Johnston, Campbell's vice president of government relations. "Studies show that the proposal would not adversely impact safety, and a user fee provision is included that would raise funds to help bridge and highway safety."

Runyan explained if approved, it would be the responsibility of individual state transportation departments to determine if their state's infrastructure could support the added truck weight.

"The entire burden would be on the state departments of transportation. We give them complete authority to make a decision," he said.

Runyan said the bill has not yet received any committee votes, but the coalition hopes to include it in the general transportation bill this fall.