

July 20, 2010

The Hon. Henry Waxman, Chairman
The Energy and Commerce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D. C. 20515

The Hon. Joe Barton, Ranking Member
The Energy and Commerce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D. C. 20515

Dear Chairman Waxman and Ranking Member Barton:

As former Administrators of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) representing three different Administrations we come together to express our united support for Sections 301 and 302 of H. R. 5381, the Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 2010. These sections address long-term funding for NHTSA's motor vehicle safety programs and will provide needed resources for one of the most important and effective public health and safety agencies of the federal government.

Additional resources for NHTSA are crucially important because the motor vehicle safety program has been under-funded for years, and indeed is losing ground to additional requirements imposed on it and to inflation. The failure to fund the vehicle safety program to keep up with inflation has meant the agency has had to limit its essential work of saving lives and preventing serious injuries.

This is no small matter. Every year about 40,000 people die in motor vehicle crashes and over 2 million are injured at a cost to society of more than \$230 billion. Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for all Americans ages 3 to 33. The personal toll on families and the financial toll on our economy are staggering. Although motor vehicle crashes account for 95 percent of all surface transportation fatalities and 99 percent of all injuries, NHTSA receives about one percent of the overall budget of the U.S. Department of Transportation. Highway deaths are equivalent to a major airplane crash every single day of the year.

H.R. 5381 seeks to redress the long-term funding shortfall in the motor vehicle safety program by including several reasonable and cost effective measures. Section 302 increases the authorization for fiscal years 2011 through 2013 from \$200 million to \$280 million. These increases are an important step in addressing the appropriate funding of an agency with such a critical lifesaving mission.

Section 301 is also an essential provision for providing a stable and secure financial foundation for the agency. It creates a dedicated Vehicle Safety Fund financed by a modest vehicle safety user fee assessed by the Secretary of Transportation from the manufacturers for each motor vehicle that is certified as compliant with applicable federal safety standards. The funds are to be used solely to carry out NHTSA's vehicle safety programs. The fee starts at \$3.00 and grows to \$9.00 by the third year, and thereafter will be adjusted for inflation. The one-time fee is extremely modest relative to other discretionary charges dealers are allowed to impose on the purchase of a new vehicle.

Congress has adopted user fees as a common and accepted method of helping to pay for government programs, particularly those affecting public health and safety. In the early 1990s, a similar program was created to fund certain activities of the Food and Drug Administration and has helped immeasurably to accelerate the speed at which the FDA reviews new drug applications. Telephone companies are allowed to charge a fee to pay for 911 access. Airlines charge passengers a "9/11 security fee" every time they board an aircraft. Congress created the Highway Trust Fund in 1956 funded by a user fee, the gas tax, to assure a continuing investment in the development, growth and safety of our essential highway system, and it now also covers funding for mass transit. Our motor vehicle safety program deserves the same type of support to assure funding to help protect our families and neighbors as they travel.

As past Administrators of this safety agency who have faced the challenges and experienced the rewards of serving our nation in advancing highway and auto safety, we urge you to support the funding provisions in H.R. 8351 and adequately fund NHTSA vehicle safety programs that have saved so many thousands of lives each year.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey W. Runge, M.D.
(Bush Administration)



Ricardo Martinez, M.D.
(Clinton Administration)



Joan Claybrook, Esq.
(Carter Administration)