



### Oral Testimony of Lewie Pugh, Executive Vice President

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, small-business truckers and professional drivers have literally put their lives on the line to keep us safe. When many Americans began working from home, truckers continued to crisscross the country, picking up and delivering items that we all need.

When COVID first hit, shippers and receivers started restricting access. Suddenly, finding a place to use the bathroom was more difficult, even impossible at times.

Drivers weren't able to find masks, hand sanitizer, or even bottled water. Ironically, they were delivering everything Americans needed to survive, though they couldn't actually buy much of it themselves. It was a cruel reality. And it wasn't until FEMA began distributing items at truck stops that many truckers finally had what they needed.

They also had no real idea what they would do if they experienced COVID symptoms while on the road, in most cases hundreds if not thousands of miles from home.

And then things went from horrible to unimaginable when freight rates dropped to historic lows, in some cases only paying pennies per mile. By May of 2020, roughly 80,000 truckers were out of work.

Congress could have temporarily suspended the federal diesel tax so drivers would keep some extra money in their pockets during the toughest times. You could have waived the heavy vehicle use tax for a year so that every truck owner would get a modest break. You could have reinstated the per diem for employee drivers or even suspended UCR payments. Instead, you hung your hats on PPP, which failed to support most small carriers.

DOT and DHS rose to the occasion. They were engaged and took a number of steps to address real issues that were affecting drivers. For example, FHWA allowed states to permit food trucks at rest areas. Unfortunately, many states, like Missouri, wouldn't allow it. **Think about that for a minute –truckers couldn't buy food at a truck stop or restaurant, yet some states had the nerve to deny them a hot meal at rest areas.** OOIDA wasn't even permitted to give free meals away in Missouri. That's a damn shame.

We were all shocked last year when this committee voted, in the middle of a global catastrophe, to increase federal insurance requirements by \$1.25 million. **Truckers watched in disbelief as members of this panel went from patting them on the back on social media to kicking them while they were down.**

Things are getting better, but safe truck parking is still a national crisis. Last year, this committee provided \$250 million for truck parking projects in the highway bill. This is a great starting point, but more must be done. We've worked with Reps. Mike Bost and Angie Craig to develop a bipartisan bill to address the problem. Despite there being over 70 members on this Committee last Congress, only 4 of you cosponsored the legislation.

So what do we want?

1. We want more truck parking. Not only should you cosponsor the Truck Parking Safety Improvement Act, but get it done.
2. Try to do something good for truckers without doing something bad. Don't cripple them with unnecessary insurance increases or a speed limiter mandate
3. Repeal the overtime exemption for employee drivers in the Fair Labor Standards Act. **I've been asked by some lawmakers what would happen as a result. My answer is simple: employee drivers would actually be paid for the hours they work. This would also cure the driver churn that big carriers tout as a driver shortage.**
4. Reinstate the per diem for employee drivers. Let them deduct their meals while out on the road again.

You can take steps to help, but you must also avoid causing unnecessary damage. Truckers have earned your respect by now. Show them some real appreciation – Twitter statements are nice but it doesn't put food on the table.

Drivers still worry about getting the vaccine while they continue to work. Finding a decent meal is still tough. Many are concerned about the future of their business, an uncertain freight market, and new regulations. **Some even fear that their business will survive COVID only to be destroyed by Congress.**

I appreciate the opportunity to participate in today's hearing and look forward to your questions.